

FRANK SASSMAN

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Q: Can you share with us something about your early life, and I mean as early as you can remember. What type of South African society did you come from?

SASSMAN: I, if you accept the Racial Classification Act, then I was classified as so-called colored. I use the term "so-called colored" because as coloreds we never accepted that classification but were forced by the laws of the country to fill in the forms and list ourselves as coloreds.

Q: If you filled in a form then it was of your own, this is something you wrote. What were the consequences of not putting in the term the government wanted you to put in?

SASSMAN: The consequences would be that you can be prosecuted because it is seen as you do not accept the laws of the country, because every citizen of the country had to be classified under the racial classification act. So you would be classified as Negro, colored, African, Indian and White.

Q: How did you think of yourself at the time? The government considered you to be colored. What was your own identity ethnic or national or community?

SASSMAN: We did not accept the term "colored." We saw ourselves as black. So I see myself as black. But here were many coloreds who accepted the term colored, and would not refer or call themselves black. Because the stain of the government's policy of apartheid was divide and conquer, divide and rule. So obviously they can split the people who were not white into different ethnic classifications, the stronger the government's policy and the more successful the policy of apartheid would be. So you would find that the government insisted the terms they used were colored, African and Indian to classify the people who were not white. And for us, as the thinking so called colored we did not accept that. We saw ourselves the country as if they want to as being white or black, but not colored or Indian.

My first language was Afrikaans. But the educational system of the time it was compulsory that you would do one language of the higher grade and your second language on the lower grade. So I started doing Afrikaans on the higher grade and English on the lower grade. But when I went to university, we did both languages on the higher grade.

A mystique was attached to the language. I never accepted although it was my first language I was hesitant to use it. With a result of when I got married and I had my own family, English became our first language, and Afrikaans became the second language. That was prevalent through many of the South African ethnic groups except for the Afrikaners who would strongly promote the Afrikaans language. So you found that many coloreds like myself where our first language was Afrikaans in our paternal homes, but in our own family we switched to English.

I was born in 1959 in Retreat like retreat, falling back. I was born in a shanty, a sort of an iron shack. In Kirstenhof. Then in early 50's the Nationalist Party came to power and they passed the colonial and heinous group Areas Act. Which made it definitely a threat to the lives of anybody who was not white.

I was living in a wooden iron shack which had no indoor plumbing, no electricity. There was a tap about say two plus minus twenty yards plus minus six meters from the back of our house. It was a communal tap.

I come from a family of ten. My mother and father and then there were eight children. We were six brothers and two sisters. My mother was a domestic worker, and my father was a fisherman who fished on the boat that went out daily from Kalk Bay Harbor, one of the southern suburbs of Cape Town. That is going in the direction of Simonstown you get to Kalk Bay before you get to Simonstown.

Let's say a wood and iron dwelling. We had I think there were two or three bedrooms and a kitchen and an outside toilet. There wasn't actually a bathroom you know. There was no kitchen sink. We would wash up in a basin. The dishes would be washed in a basin, not a sink like we have in the modern apartments.

Q: It sounds more like a commune than a family dwelling.

SASSMAN: Exactly. There were a lot of houses, each. The property was not ours. It was owned by a white Afrikaner Kirsten. That is why they call the area Kirstenhof. It was a community of about 80 to 100 families living in that area.

Q: You achieved a very high level of education. How did this start?

SASSMAN: Well it started before I became of school going age the Group Areas Act was passed by the Nationalist government and we were forcibly removed. It was declared a white area for the white ethnic group. So anybody who was not white was not allowed to live in that area. The so-called colored family and our neighbors we were all forcibly removed and settled in an area called Stuerhof, sometimes called Deep River, which was one of the southern suburbs. We had to move into a council dwelling. In other words houses built and owned by the city of Cape Town, the Cape Town city council. So I was about four years old when we moved there and started my schooling at the primary school run by the Anglican Church, St. Luke's primary school.

I should stress that the building is owned by the Anglican Church. Teachers are appointed by the Western Cape Education Department. The education is the same as I would have gotten in any other public school.

There was the education department which was for the white ethnic group. There was the department of Indian affairs. There was the department of Bantu affairs, which was for Black African education. With each of these education departments, the education offered was inferior. The top one would be the white. The one for colored and Indians would be comparable. The worst one was the one for Bantu education, for the black African. Bantu education brought about the school riots in 1976 which brought about the change in the country. So the lesson that came out of that, they wanted to make the main medium of instruction in Bantu education Afrikaans. The Black Africans as I prefer to call them detested that language. The lesson that I learned out of that is, don't mess with a person's language. It is very important. It was so important that it brought about the change in this country.

Because of the Group Areas Act the whole country is divided, so you would find coloreds, an area would be for people of the colored ethnic group only. Another area would be for the Indian ethnic group. Another area would be for Black Africans only. Another area would be for whites only. So the whole country was divided into group areas. So you would find that the best areas obviously would be given to the white ethnic group. There they wouldn't make distinction between the Afrikaans speaking white and the English speaking white. So then of course by virtue of the fact that if I live now in say that particular area in Stuerhof, it was a very large pocket where this municipal housing scheme was there would only be coloreds. But then normally it was a railway track or a major road that would be the boundary. Then on the other side of the tracks would be white. So we were surrounded by whites but we never socialized with them. And to a certain extent the legislation prevented socialization across color lines. It was actually laws that would prosecute you. Like for instance you couldn't dance with a white. Coloreds and Africans and Indians can dance together but not the white. They couldn't because of the immorality act, I could not have a relationship with a white woman.

Q: Tell me about the Immorality Act. Was that from the same period 40's-50's?

SASSMAN: The Immorality Act was also in the 40's and 60's which the state actually had white inspectors who would monitor people who were having relationships across the color line. These people would normally when things really got serious would go and resettle in countries like Swaziland, Botswana. They were like principalities or whatever you want to call it, within South Africa, but they had individual sovereign rights. So if these inspectors if they know you are having a relationship with a white woman as a black Indian or colored, they would hide in the bedroom, you know in the cupboard, and when things really got serious.

Q: The inspector would be in the room?

SASSMAN: Yeah, because he knows now that you are having a relationship with a person other, you know with a white person. Then they would arrest the couple and they would be charged under the Immorality Act.

Q: Amazing. It sounds like a Peter Sellers movie. So there is this inspector under the bed or in the closet?

SASSMAN: In the closet, under the bed but mostly in the closet.

Q: People know this. Didn't they check under the bed?

SASSMAN: They didn't suspect, you know. They didn't know that the authorities knew about them. Or sometimes you would have informers who would inform the appropriate authorities that X and Y is having a racial relationship across color lines.

Q: So the penalty once detained or once identified, you say that one of the people could be resettled to a distant country.

SASSMAN: No, what would happen is you could be charged under the Morality Act. In most cases there would be a fine. In other cases the one person would be prosecuted and sentenced.

Q: Sentenced to what?

SASSMAN: Maybe two months, three months. It has happened.

Travel was possible, but there was control over the passport being issued. A passport at that time was not a right; it was a privilege.

Q: A passport permitting exit from the country.

SASSMAN: Yeah traveling out of the country.

Q: Similar to the Soviet travel passport.

SASSMAN: I would say so because you see like the first passport I got was to travel to the United States. I was going to the United States, so when I applied for the passport it said I could only travel to the United States and to Namibia, Lesotho, Swaziland and Botswana. I didn't get all countries like you get today. So they controlled where you could, and you would never get a passport to go to any of the African countries. You would get a passport to go to the communist countries like Cuba you know, Soviet Union etc. So it was controlled, and it was not a right, it was a privilege. Traveling was limited and it was a privilege.

Q: But the U.S. was permitted.

SASSMAN: In '76 I went to the United States working for the U.S. government. It was my first time on an airplane. It was my first time outside the country. So people didn't travel a lot, and it wasn't easy to travel for various reasons.

I just want to tell you a little more about the group areas act. The Group Areas Act was an act that was passed to create an infrastructure conducive to the nationalist government's apartheid policy. You know the strength of their policy was on divide and rule. Keep the ethnic groups separate, so everything, the Group Areas Act made sure that in every sphere of South African life and society we were separate. It called for separate schools. It called for separate transport systems. Like we couldn't travel as a white and a black, we couldn't travel on a bus together, on a train taxi. Everything was separated under the group. Sports. Special sports for African, colored, Indian. You couldn't find a colored, a time like now which would have mixed races in the team. Everything was separate. Schooling was separate, seven separate education departments. Even our universities, let me tell you what happened with the universities under the Group Areas Act. The universities were like UCT [University of Cape Town] and Wits [University of Witwatersrand, Johannesburg], and the other major universities. They allowed people of different ethnic groups to study at the university, and that is after standard 10 or grade 12, right, when you would start your first year at the university. But when the university extension act was passed, this called for separate universities for the separate ethnic groups. So what happened, UCT was closed to people other than white. Those of us like myself who were studying at UCT under the system...

The University exchange Act was passed. So they told us, "Listen. When you are finished with your degree you cannot just come back. It is not automatic. You have got to go through the permit system."

Q: Then the University Extension Act was passed.

SASSMAN: Then Wits became a university for whites in the Eastern Cape. But the language thing then suffers because predominately English speaking whites the university catered for them, Rhodes University. So they then established a university for the Afrikaans speaking group, and that was the University of Port Elizabeth in the eastern cape. But they catered for about plus or minus 6000 learners, students to attend that university for the Afrikaner group. They only managed to muster plus or minus 2000 at the time.

Q: Were the professors all white?

SASSMAN: I would say at that time plus-minus 80% of the professors were white. Afrikaner the highest quality. Then the bad thing about this was then the kids, the students then decided to choose disciplines that is not offered at their ethnic university in order to get a better education. So the courses that they offered turned to be drama. Turned out to be architecture, medicine, you know, sort of courses that is not offered at the ethnic university. But the bad thing about that was they would go and they would get into these faculties and discover that this is not what I wanted to do. So the drop out rate was exacerbated tremendously. Also if you look at courses like architecture or medicine, they are seven year courses. It was too long and many of these kids because the educational system was also inferior. Like you take a guy coming from say a rural black high school, coming to a school like UCT, of course there were no bridging programs at that time because of the inferiority of the...

Q: So they were set up for failure.

SASSMAN: Failure, yeah, and the dropout rate was tremendously high. I was at the University of Cape Town. Now I was in my final year so I graduated. I was allowed to graduate, but I was not allowed to re-register because I wanted to communications and sociology were my two majors. That was offered at The University of the Western Cape.

Q: The "Bush" college.

SASSMAN: The bush college. So I wouldn't go there. I didn't want to do it at that time. Now of course the bush college is internationally recognized. The guys turned the tables on the government with UWC, but at that time it was a bush college and I wasn't going to go for an inferior education. So what I did then, I did my second degree in communications. That is when I joined USIS. I did my second degree with a major in communications and diplomacy. I did that, communication and sociology were my two majors. So I did that through UNISA, the University of South Africa.

Q: So you graduated from UCT. What was the name of the diploma, what we would call a bachelors degree?

SASSMAN: Yeah, it was given as a lower diploma in library science, but when I did my second degree with UNISA, you know the degree in communication and sociology, they upgraded that to a degree in library science.

At that time under the Group Areas Act, as I said, education, libraries, there were libraries for whites only; there were libraries for coloreds and Indian and there were libraries for black Africans.

Q: Tell us about the library where you worked.

SASSMAN: I worked for different libraries under the municipality of Cape Town in colored areas. So the clientele were all colored. Whites weren't allowed to come there.

Q: So you worked in more than one library.

SASSMAN: I became a senior librarian and ended up training the young librarians going into my place. But I had a library, well I was assigned as librarian in charge at different libraries. All of the main colored libraries I served as librarian there because they would move you around. They don't leave you all the time, 14 years, at one. But I would go around, and at my library where I was the librarian in charge there I would train colored librarians and African librarians going to the colored and African libraries. The other thing that I should mention here that is significant is that the different libraries were for the different ethnic groups, white, they would have different people.

We were assigned to a particular library. Then say after three or four years you would go to another library. But throughout the time that I was working there, I would be sort of seen as a senior librarian training young librarians coming in. But what I should mention is, it came to me and now it has disappeared again. Now while I worked for the city libraries I didn't agree with all their policies you know. The one thing I thought was that the library shouldn't just be a place where people come to borrow books and leave. I thought that it would be a cultural center where I could invite guest speakers to come and do talks. Then that was also the time when there was the U.S. moon exploration programs. Then I got Rupert Early who was the specialist monitoring astronaut activities from the U.S. side, and I invited Rupert Early to come and do a talk, and I started a borrowers association, library borrowers association.

Q: Rupert Early was someone in the States?

SASSMAN: No, he was a South African who monitored and was involved with the astronaut program. Then I did this and I also one of the other extra little projects I organized was I discovered there were a lot of artists, painters living as part of my clientele I was serving. Then I arranged a big art exhibition for members of my clientele who were involved in art. Some of these were international artists like Peter Clark, Kenneth Baker. Then the city librarian did not agree with this. I founded them on my own. But then I used Albert Green who was the art critic at the Argus as the critic.

The Argus, the evening English language newspaper. I then used Albert Green as the person to critique the art exhibition. There was a lot of coverage in the local newspapers, in the local radio, and then the city librarian wanted to be part of the act now. I said, no I am not going to lie to you because when I came to you for money I couldn't have any money. But then Bob Gosende saw this in the paper, and he was the big shot at the USIS Cape Town. He called me in and said, "Frank, I have a librarian here but she is not doing what I want her to do. You are the type of guy I want to come and run my library." That is how I joined the USIS in 1972. Bob Gosende was my director. I served about three years as librarian and then Bob says, "No, I want you to be the public affairs assistant. "

Q: This all happened very quickly.

SASSMAN: Yeah. He said, "No I want you and you have the potential." So Bob is the guy who got me into USIS in that way. When I started, Bob put me in as person in charge of all programming, exchanges and programming and his assistant you know. Then I said to Bob, I don't have the qualifications in diplomacy or whatever. Can I register with UNISA and do a degree in communications and sociology but specializing in diplomacy and public relations. So Bob then spoke to USIS in Pretoria and USIS paid for my studies to qualify with UNISA in communications with a specialization in diplomacy.

Q: UNISA was distance learning so you were working full time.

SASSMAN: I was working fulltime. So if you joined UNISA you get study guides.

Q: So you were a full time employee and you were also doing an advanced degree.

SASSMAN: I was doing my second degree with UNISA. USIS paid for my studies and my books, and I could get a lot of the books in the USIS library so I did my studies. Anybody who wanted to study to upgrade themselves was allowed to do so.

Q:A classification team came from Washington...

SASSMAN: From Washington. It was a classification team looking at upgrading salaries. Then we also got a car allowance which was unique. But we negotiated this with the team. And we also got a food allowance because they said there were too few in Cape Town to give a cafeteria. So I said to them well if there is too few, we can do something else." The said, "Well what can we do?" I said, "Look why don't you go to Cal Tech, the American multinational who have cafeterias and see how they subsidize them." They said, "What do you mean?" I said, "Look, go to Cal Tech or to 3-M one of the companies, and say to them how do you subsidize." So at that time the multi national corporations their cafeterias would serve plates of curry and rice for two rand. They only paid two rand, right. So it was subsidized. So but how do we do that? I said, "Well you go to 3-M or to Cal Tech and ask them to give you a plate of food. Then you go to a take away and ask them how much do they sell that plate of food for. So they took that and the take away guy said we sell it for 12 rand. So I said to them, "OK, seeing those guys only paid two rand, you give us ten rand food subsidy, and then we pay the two rand so we can buy. The inspectors laughed and said, "No that is good Frank, we can give you a food allowance." So we successfully negotiated an education allowance, a 60% housing subsidy repayment bond and the food subsidy.

Q: Do you think this would be possible today in these days of cost cutting?

SASSMAN: Well I think you can check this out with the embassy but I think these subsidies are still in operation. But you see then the Sullivan principles came out in the U.S. and the embassy their policy was they should upgrade the living standards and life style of their employees. So this put it in well. They looked good with the Sullivan principles.

Q: Let's explain to the person reading here about the Sullivan Principles.

SASSMAN: Yeah, the Sullivan Principles, Leon Sullivan was a minister of religion in the U.S. He was at that time the Ford Motor Company and multi nationals were pressurized to do something for the black employees in Sough Africa They came out with the principles in which way the living standards must be upgraded. Leon Sullivan was the mover behind that. He, then insisted that these principles must be at the UN. These became official principles that the U.S. government also enforced in the UN.

Q: There was some controversy about the Sullivan principles. Some people said if you incrementally improve the system it would be impossible to end the system. So there was some controversy about that.

SASSMAN: The thing is that is why as FSNs we insisted this is going to help, it should be for all who are underprivileged, whether they were a white group we did not do it for blacks only. So it was possible.

Q: So this was not strictly tied to the Sullivan principle, but the Sullivan principles were the rationale that the U.S. government used to make this possible.

SASSMAN: The Sullivan principles did that they should enhance the quality of life of the employees. This enabled us to buy houses once the Group Areas Act was abolished in the former white areas. So it vastly improved the standard of housing, and resultantly the standard of living. But as I say it wasn't exclusive to blacks it was to all employees who qualified.

Q: So I sense we are in the 70's here. A gradual change because the U.S. government, as an employee of the U.S. government you were able to effect a type of change that was not possible outside of the U.S. embassy community I think, and yet you were permitted to move into an area. It sounds as if the changes that happened in South Africa were gradual.

SASSMAN: It was gradual. And one thing you must take cognizance of the U.S. government conditions of employment in South Africa. Every year a team would come out from Washington to conduct wage surveys. It was not just wages, but more importantly conditions of service. So they would go and select about ten or twenty U.S. corporates in South Africa and do a survey of conditions of employment. That is why they approved the housing subsidy because most U.S. companies were paying housing subsidies to the employees. They paid education.

Q: So the embassy matched the private sector.

SASSMAN: Right, and we suggested this to the classification team that came. They with the wage surveys said we must give this to our employees because it is being offered by the American companies in South Africa.

The wage survey team, this was also supported by the American ambassador in South Africa who was actually behind us seeing this wage classification team and first speaking to them. Now what is interesting about this, the U.S. government or the people assigned by the U.S. government to consider the subsidies we are asking declined. They rejected on the very grounds you are mentioning. How can we give this to South Africa when we are not going to give this to any other FSNs.

Q: Defined by the bureaucracy in Washington you mean?

SASSMAN: The Bureaucracy in Washington and the reasoning was exactly what you brought up now. Can we give it to South Africans now and make them unique getting this where nowhere else in the world is this offered. So then the ambassador called me and said, "Frank, are you accepting this?" He called me and So I said, "No I am not accepting this." "Well you have got to substantiate." I said, "I can't substantiate. Mr. Ambassador, you should go back to Washington and tell them the reason I feel this should be given to South Africans if it is unique because my argument is nowhere else in the world is pigmentation a criteria for granting a bond, subsidy to South Africa. That makes us unique. But it is a violation of our rights." The Ambassador went in and he came back and said, "Fine, they will approve." You see what I am saying is I couldn't blame the U.S. because any rational independent thinking person would come up as you did with the point you raised. Then when I countered the Ambassador said, "Frank, I like that."

Q: Let's dwell a moment on Bart Rousseve who was a great mentor. Bart Rousseve, an African American from New Orleans who worked in New York and in Washington with various organizations

SASSMAN: Operation Crossroads Africa was the main one. He and Jerry Vogel.

Q: Right, and later I saw Jerry a couple of months ago. And later the International Institute of Education, the African American Institute. He came to South Africa, I believe that the South African government gave him a visa each time he came. He was an honorary white because I think Black citizens from other countries had restrictions or were not welcome.

SASSMAN: These participants in Operation Crossroads Africa they were young professionals. They were just starting on their careers. They were very competent people, but they were maybe community workers. They were maybe government officials. But as a result of the Operation Crossroads experience, they developed international contacts, especially contacts with their counterparts in Africa which was nonexistent. Because that operation crossroads Africa program was unique in the sense that it got groups of young African professionals from all countries in Africa together so they had both the U.S. and the African experience, with made it a very unique program. Today, a couple of weeks back I spoke to a guy who says he still has contacts that he got out of that program with guys that he met on the _____. This guy in Ghana, he is now the surrogate father of this guy's children. And the guys come to you and say Frank thanks for printing that. You know South Africa was isolated. We had no entrance to Africa. They had to go six or ten thousand miles to meet their African counterparts.

Q: Would you explain Ron Hendrickse.

SASSMAN: Ron Hendrickse was a colleague of mine working on exchanges. He is still with USIS at the moment. Now he was the one running exchanges at the time, took over from me the Operation Crossroads Africa program, and Bart raised the belief that you mentioned that most of the participants on the Operation Crossroads Africa were recommended or selected by their respective governments. These participants when they met with the South Africans just assumed that their South African participants were also selected and recommended by their government, right. So then I said to Bart we must talk. We explained to him that in South Africa the South African government is in no way involved in the selection program. The U.S. the our U.S. officers in South Africa used to take a long night off the program and FSNs and an American officer would make up a panel which would selected the respective South Africans to go. So there was no government involvement. So we said to Bart it is important that at the orientation in the U.S. that you make this point with the participants, Operation Crossroads Africa participants from other countries that although they were recommended and selected by their government, because of the apartheid programs and because of the status of the South African government they were not involved in the operations. Bart said that and it helped out tremendously.

Let me mention something else that will shock you. I with debriefing, we would always send him a report how these South Africans found it. One guy from Port Elizabeth was a participant. He mentioned something very significant. He said they had a discussion on a ferry going around the Statue of Liberty or somewhere in New York where the Operation Crossroads Africa. He was, when he came back he was as always the case many of the South African security police divisions were detained our grantees when they returned and interrogated them. What this guy said to me, he said, "Frank if I didn't hear this myself, and I had to pinch myself to see if I was not dreaming. One of the security police officials could recite virtually verbatim a discussion that this guy Ernie had with other participants on the ferry around." So What you guys didn't know, I didn't mention this to our BPAO [Branch Public Affairs Officer] at the time that they had infiltrated. They were so scared of us taking these young blacks, and they couldn't refuse them passports or traveling facilities, so they put the informers on the a police informer on them.

Q: Well this is a mind boggling thing. Informers would be ethnically the same, that is to say majority population, African or colored who were working for the police. Now you say that the South African government had nothing to do with the selection. Were they able to bribe participants after the selection?

SASSMAN: I later found out there were informers, blacks you know.

Q: So these would be people with a certain presence but clandestinely working with the South African police and then went to inform on the others. Now you said the South African government could not refuse to give passports. I thought they could refuse.

SASSMAN: Let me explain that and elaborate on that. You see if you as a black apply for a passport, as I say it is a privilege, not a right. Now because he gets a letter from the U.S. ambassador inviting now this is the OCA participant, inviting him or her to go on this program to the United States, it is more difficult for them to refuse that passport application.

Q: Why? Are they afraid of the American embassy?

SASSMAN: Well yeah. It is because the U.S. government is inviting him it is going to put them in a bad light. They don't want to give this person the right to go on the program. But then they reconsider when you approach them and say, now they don't say no. they just delay it. Now it is maybe two or three weeks before departure. Like we nominated a guy who was going into community policing to go on Operation Crossroads Africa to interact with his peer group in the U.S. they kept on and in the end it was two weeks before departure. So I had to call the guy who happened to be a so-called colored guy who was in this position who had to approve the leave for this person and permission to go. He said he made all kinds of excuses. I must now rattle your cage. So I said to him, "Look, I cannot tell you how to do your job. As the senior brigadier in the police it is your right to grant him leave or not. But all I want to tell you the U.S. government has obligated ten thousand dollars for this program and you know fiscal policies within government, if that money is not utilized," I lied to him and said, "they want to get it from somebody because they are going to lose that money. I don't know if they are going to get you as the person who refused the leave to get the money back. " He said, "OK, let me think about it."

Q: So you bluffed...

SASSMAN: Yeah I bluffed. I said I wasn't sure. I can't say they are going to but what if they now hold you liable because you refused this guy going and notice is too short to find another person. So I am just saying to you that if that happens then they are going to see you as the person liable for this person not going. So he called me back that afternoon and he said, "Look I have told Ike to pack his bags and he is going." So this is how you play and you have to challenge but always because it is the U.S. government inviting the person they would give the passport to that person to travel whereas the average person just going on his own, and they would use delaying tactics and then at the last minute they would.

This was in the late 80's. Now the thing is they wanted to the idea of not getting the passport is isolated, especially black South Africans from interacting with their peers.

Q: Which is what the South African...

SASSMAN: That is what they wanted. The other thing they came up with another ploy. When they saw now that they had to give passports, South African Passports to these guys to refuse the passports so they cannot travel. So what they did when they created the homeland policy, you know the homeland policy was although you lived in Guguletu, Khayelitsha or in the Cape Town urban area, if you were born in a homeland you would not be a South African citizen. You would get a transcribed passport.

Q: We should say these passports were recognized nowhere in the world except in South Africa.

SASSMAN: Right. So now say you were a student and they can trace you back to the Ciskei. You would get a Ciskei passport. You have got a Fulbright grant to go and do a masters or a Ph.D. The U.S. does not recognize a Ciskei passport so they say sorry you can't get the grant. So what I was one of the people in a meeting with the embassy officials where we came up with this and I suggested and simultaneously an American officer also suggested it. I said, "Why don't we do this, we accept that passport, right, but we do not put a visa in the passport. We let the person who is a Ciskei citizen submit two photographs, three photographs. Then the one photograph we put on a piece of paper. We stamp the visa on a piece of paper and then we attach it to the passport. That person then travels to the U.S. on a Ciskei passport. When he enters the entry is stamped on the page that is attached to the passport with his photograph. When he leaves they rip it out. So he can't prove that the U.S. accepted his passport. So that worked. So we then took the guys on the homeland passports.

Q: I cannot imagine the Department of Homeland Security accepting such a thing now. In those days was there a closer connection between the consular services? How did you persuade the U.S. government in the port of Kennedy Airport in New York City to accept a Ciskei passport?

SASSMAN: We had a meeting in Cape Town. It was the political officer; A decision came out of that meeting. I was one of the people who suggested that...

Q: The decision was made in Cape Town.

SASSMAN: In Cape Town and then sent to Washington. In order to get the officials at Kennedy or Reagan to accept this it had to go through Washington or through the agency.

Q: The INS, the Immigration and Naturalization Service, they cooperated.

SASSMAN: They cooperated because we then accepted as I say they had to give an extra photograph, and this was put on a separate sheet of paper that was attached to the passport. So the passport had no visa stamp in it. The passport had no entry or exit stamp in it.

SASSMAN: I see some, and I remember also the American diplomats at one time had to travel with two passports if they traveled to Africa especially if they had a South African connection. So there were flexibility and I know we had that meeting and it was conveyed to Washington to the appropriate people in Washington, and the immigration people accepted that. Because you see they said it was unfair to deprive the black South African or the black African in South Africa of studying or visiting the U.S. because of the South African government's policy. That homeland policy was obviously designed to prevent blacks from traveling.

Q: Well this is astonishing because the U.S. government which was receiving a lot of criticism for being easy on the apartheid system, in fact at least the INS and the embassy consulate were in fact working perfectly harmoniously with those who had ideas on how to get around the rules.

SASSMAN: Definitely that was the case because in the initial reaction of the consulate and immigration was they guy has a Ciskei passport he can't go. We do not recognize that. But at this meeting we discussed this and said it is unfair. We are depriving that.

Q: I understand the argument in South Africa. What is amazing to me is that it was accepted by the authorities in Washington. How long did it take to persuade them, weeks, months?

SASSMAN: Months. It wasn't very long. But you must admit that it wouldn't have worked if Washington hadn't approved it.

Q: Who convinced Washington, was it the ambassador do you think?

SASSMAN: Could be. The Ambassador as head of the mission he had to be involved in this, and maybe with the Secretary of State for African Affairs was Chester Crocker.

Q: Yes, and Hank Cohen. Again just for the record Chester Crocker the author of Constructive Engagement, was under enormous criticism from the left wing in the United States as being a sellout, by being too friendly. And so many paradoxes in the American intelligentsia, Chet Crocker at the time was a very controversial, Frank, as a South African, and from your perspective, it seems that some measures were taken which in fact were pretty helpful to the social advancement...

SASSMAN: Yeah, Americans saw it in South Africa we had tremendous problems with Constructive Engagement. You had South African leadership refusing to come to some of our programs, refusing to participate on our programs. What I found was that I understand why they opted for constructive engagement. They started from the premise at first to challenge the South Africans, of course not wanting to change, isolating them, embargoes whatever. Then they saw look, why not try and show them we are their friend and want to try to help them So they came with constructive engagement.

Yeah, and I remember Sandy Ungar [former NPR correspondent] and guys writing, I know Sandy.

Q: Now the president of Goucher College.

SASSMAN: I know. I actually saw, did he seem ever since, I think I did, yes. But the thing is that they tried but constructive engagement was my worst time as a black South African working for the embassy. You can imagine the flak I got from my contacts.

Q: Tell me more. You are talking about the politically aware, the intelligentsia considering you to be too friendly with an evil process.

SASSMAN: Yeah. Look, I always to survive and for my credibility to transcend political ideologies, I never during my time with USIS publicly declared my political ideologies. I was a professional. I took the job and I knew I couldn't only work with guys who have the same political ideologies I had. I had to work with guys who support the apartheid structure, the CP, the freedom front. As a professional I had to give them the same service as I give the guy from the PAC. So I took a leave . I did the Book of Tutu. Tutu is never publicly declared his political ideology.

Boesak made a mistake. He publicly declared his political ideology. You know with Cope he is coming back into the political arena now. He has been nominated now if Cape wins the Western Cape he will be the premier. So I found that even like my friends they used to joke about it. They would say how is the American spy coming. But it was said in jest the Zalpo, the PAC guys, but they all respected me because they didn't know where my political leanings were.

So I find for me the worst time as a South African and to convince my contacts and to retain my credibility was the constructive engagement. The other thing about constructive engagement even the guys like at that time the PFP, the Progressive Federal party of what is now the DA, Democratic Alliance. This is Colin Eglin. They refused to even come to the Fourth of July one year because of this closeness, and they actually asked Piet Koornhof a minister at that time of home affairs to be the guest speaker at the Fourth of July, and that was the year that Pete Koornhof gave the order for the authorities to demolish the temporary housing in winter, the temporary housing of squatters in crossroads to go in and break down the shelters. And at night, the people during the day would break down the shelters. At night they bury it, and at night they put up the shacks as shelters again.

Q: I am sorry, the name of this man?

SASSMAN: Dr. Pieter Koornhof. Now he was the minister of home affairs at the time. No, minister of community development.

Q: And his version of development was to demolish the housing.

SASSMAN: Yeah, and they The PFP guys, this is the Progressive Freedom Party, which was the chief opposition. They said is this the U.S. government's reward to Pieter Koornhof to address the Fourth of July function by virtue of the fact that he demolished the shacks. So you see that is what we had to live with. It was a bad time, and we as FSNs were also tarnished with the same brush. A lot of guys refused U.S. government grants on the grounds of that if you are close with the South African government. It means that you are supporting apartheid, you know all kinds of interpretations.

Q: This is an enormously important principle . If you are trying to change a system that has it wrong, you can confront; you can engage constructively, You can ignore; you can turn to violence as some people did. What was your moral compass at that time. Not to be flattering, I have no need to be flattering, but how were you so smart as to know that not revealing a personal ideology enhanced your personal credibility. How did you understand that?

SASSMAN: Look, I just took a leaf out of Desmond Tutu's book. I saw what he was doing and what was happening to Boesak. I realized if I do not declare my political ideology, they wouldn't know which way my leanings are.

Q: Did you do this in public?

SASSMAN: Look, it would be mostly on one on one issues, and it would be in a room in this guy's office or it would be in a room say at USIS where you get the two of them to meet over coffee and chat. So I wouldn't say it was in public per se.

Q: Now you say you took this from Tutu. I am sure you discussed this with your American colleagues.

SASSMAN: They never asked me and I never discussed it with them.

Q: They never asked and you never discussed.

SASSMAN: They unless they knew what my leanings were, but we never discussed this. This is a viable strategy.

Q: This was an enormous guiding principle in doing the work that you do.

SASSMAN: They never asked me, and that was a survival strategy with me. Could you imagine if I even shouted my political activities you know. I remember we had an incident where the police arrested seven, no eight high school students. They were going to make an example of them because these kids were at a political rally and the security police chased them and they caught these eight kids. They charged them with terrorist activities for going to this rally. The one kid before he was sentenced skipped the country, but the other seven, and my niece happened to be one of them. That is why I got involved. So then these were 17-18 year olds. They had the trial and some of them were sentenced to five years, some of them were sentenced to three years and some of them were sentenced to one year in prison, political prisoners.

Q: What was the nature of the gathering?

SASSMAN: It was a political rally where you know, say undercover ANC leadership and black politicians were speaking. In any case....

Q: So they were accused of terrorism. For attending a political discussion.

SASSMAN: Yeah. So they chased and they just randomly caught these eight kids. So these kids were going to prison, and the sentencing was political, but they weren't treated as political criminals. They were going to be thrown in with thieves, murderers etc. You know what would happen to kids that age in prison. So I then went clandestinely, I didn't even tell the Americans, and that time these guys didn't know about press conferences. But my American experience made me unique. Even the ANC domestic wing contacted me to find out how do you do press conferences. In any case, I did a press conference, and I said to the guys, we must have a press conference to focus the plight, international attention to the plight of these kids. Here are 17-18 year olds who are going to prison. They are going to be thrown in with common prisoners. What is going to happen to these kids. I went to a meeting of the Weinberg crisis committee, and couldn't convince everybody that we should have this press conference.

Q: Were they afraid?

SASSMAN: No, they were two groups. There were guys who went out that were ANC and then guys who were the unity movement. Only the new Unity Movement is an old political movement, but at that time they were swimming against the mainstream, but the guys were very eloquent and were more vocal than the other guys. So I said to the guy who was chairman at the time I said, "Listen, these guys although they are the most vocal, they are in the minority. So let's pass two motions and vote on it. If we vote, the majority is going to vote in favor of the press conference." He said, "Frank that is excellent." This guy is now the chief legal advisor to the South African government.. So we then I got another guy to pass the first motion that we must have the press conference. Another guy passed the second motion that we shouldn't have it. So then when we voted pick the one you favor. They were more vocal, but they were in the minority. So we had the press conference. I tell you then I did a press release. I sent it through SAPA. The guy at SAPA said to me , no we can get onto the wires.

Q: South African Press Agency.

SASSMAN: South African Press Agency, yes. They sent it to all the media outlets, and then I could contact all these foreign media correspondents because parliament is in Cape Town. And I worked with them. So we had ABC; we had Columbia; we had the Germans; we had the Swiss. The television cameras were all there. You know I heard afterwards, this was in the annex of St. George's Cathedral. Because you know with the media you have to go where they are, to be convenient for them. We had it over lunch time. The place was surrounded by security police. But I wasn't at the table. I briefed the guy who was chairing how to handle a press conference.

Then we had every paper, international, they all covered this. Here was kid 17-18 who is now going to be made an example for other students. We had the thing, man it was such a success.

Q: Well this is very delicate. You were working for the U.S. government.

SASSMAN: I put my neck out there. You are the first one to tell this. But I mean I don't care. I am out.

Q: But it is very admirable what you did. Again the risks that you took. First of all the security people were there and bad things could have happened. Second the Americans, what you did might have fit into the American strategy or not. So you were dealing at the time as an individual.

SASSMAN: Yeah, they wouldn't have supported me on this one.

Q: They wouldn't have?

SASSMAN: Yeah. Because you see the reason I did it then I knew the risk involved. It was my sister's daughter who was being used by the security police to get a message across, and it was a risk and I knew. Because the ambassador at the time you know they arrested my son to get to, to scare me. At that time it was job related. These things were job related, and I went to the ambassador and I told him they interrogated my son and I then with this guy was no legal advisor for the government. He was my attorney. We turned the case around and my son was acquitted. I will tell you later how that happened. So I thought that we must, Look OK so I went to the ambassador to tell him what happened with my son. They arrested my son to scare me and all that. So the Ambassador said to me "Frank, if anything is officially job related, and you have any problems with the security police, you come and see me." The ambassador and said that if it is an assignment they gave me and because of that I get into disfavor with the security police then they will bat for me as far as they can go. I don't know what he meant by that.

Q: The same thing you meant if you go and rob a bank you will not...

SASSMAN: Exactly. Say he gives me an assignment and I carry out the assignment which is an official duties, then he says they will, and he even said if it means getting you and the family if it is so bad they must get me out of the country, they will still try and support. But he didn't say how far they would go but he said he was doing, because look. I was discussed in parliament at one time about activities in the Eastern

cape. This was a hotbed for South African activities. He said to me, "Now Look, you do..." And I told him the security police guys from the dockyard where my brother worked for the South African navy. This guy called me and he asked me and he said he was with the navy security, if he can come and speak to me because my brother and myself would meet at social functions and my brother in the navy might tell me secrets. I said, "Listen, the last thing we talk about is the shop or job. We talk about family issues." As a family we get together. I said, "Are you sure you are not the security police." He said, "No, don't think that. We are not. But we would like to meet with you."

I said, "Well let me discuss this with the ambassador. I am not involved in any subversive activities. I am working for the embassy as you know, but I would like my ambassador to be there at this meeting." He said, "No I want to see you at your home." I said, 'No, you are not coming to my home. You come to the embassy and if it is legit that you are concerned about naval security issues you come and talk to me in front of the ambassador and he will concur and vouch for what I am telling you." I never heard from them again. So I knew they were concerned and wanted to know what I am involved in, so that is why I went to the ambassador and told him, and he said to me now at the point we raised is what I did that time I stuck my neck out.

Q: Well you had a personal connection with your niece.

SASSMAN: Yeah, if anything had to happen, and I understand that then, that it would have been my neck. They would have said look, because the embassy in no uncertain terms told us don't get involved in that type of thing. Well this is now BPAO, who was a very apolitical guy, but that is what he told me when there were marchers and things like that. He said, "If you guys go to these things," and I was beaten up at two marches, but he said, "You are on your own. You can get into trouble." I believe that was his policy or it was embassy policy, but I just assumed that it wouldn't be good for me as an employee of the embassy to get involved. And many of us did that. We were involved, but very subtly.

Q: Well you were smart enough to get something to happen that you might have been the leader yourself in public because of your professional capacity it was smarter to get someone else to actually get the work. And they did not know how to run a press conference.

SASSMAN: But I briefed them. With my American experience I could say the embassy helped. And you know that thing was so successful that I heard later that the Brigadier at Pollsmoor Prison called the warders and guys together and says, "Listen, no matter what happens, nothing must happen to these seven kids in prison. They must be given VIP treatment, and even if it means they can walk freely in the corridors," which happened, "they must be treated like VIPs in this place."

When I came to the U.S. in '87, the newspaper interviewed me about all this. I don't know how they knew that I was involved in this, but they interviewed me. It was a front page article. But then you see those kids were not scared because we had psychologists counseling them before they went in. They were given VIP treatment.

Q: Did the sentences hold? One three and five years?

SASSMAN: Yeah, one three and five years. I think the kid who had five years he was the eighth one who skipped the country. But you don't serve three years. You serve about less than a year if you are sentenced to three years. But they all were sentenced and they were not scared. When this very nice girl married as a kid. So we did a lot of work. It cost a lot of work. It was as I said I stuck my neck out there. If it had gone the wrong way, but I think I protected myself by not being visible. Nobody could point a finger at Frank Sassman being at the press conference, that all was packed. You had all the local journalists. You had the international media representatives were there.

Q: In this case, you were not doing this as a government employee, you were doing this as an individual.

SASSMAN: In my personal capacity.

Q: The strategy of not being visible, any more thoughts about that? Let's say you did represent the government and you were instructed by your peers to do something and be invisible, would you have the same enthusiasm for that as the circumstances where you were a person not comparable.

SASSMAN: No, I don't think it is comparable because I did this primarily because of my niece being involved you know. My sister's daughter. I did that. I must stress that these were trumped up charges. These kids were not involved in terrorism. It was just taking eight school kids. They must have been told take these kids, and we want to show other learners that you are going to prison if you go to these rallies. So I think it wouldn't have been the same had I been given. For instance when the Truth Commission came, The BPAO and the political officer came to me and they said they wanted me to go and be at these hearings and report back. Now that was an official assignment, understand. But I think if I say the way I did it, I just took it for myself that the embassy would not be happy with me arranging that press conference.

Q: One more question, the eight kids arrested, can you remember the year that happened?

SASSMAN: That was in the early 80's.

Q: The notion of brinksmanship, you had a confrontation between two governments working and sometimes with the same goals and sometimes with opposite goals. If you were smart enough you could use strategies. You were this marvelous ploy that you mentioned of a person not giving a passport might be financially reliable which is a total bluff. But there was some point of leverage where the South African officials you tell this, they feared they had doubts. You had the ability or you developed the ability to find the weak points of the apartheid people, the individuals. Any general comments at this time. I think we will come up with this many times because this is really the story of what you have done, it is brinkmanship.

SASSMAN: Yeah. Let me try and answer that. You see I had this thing even before Bob Gosende contacted me. I had a British guy that I knew who was a diplomat. I wanted to make diplomacy my career, but I had many problems with that. If I had to go and be a South African diplomat I had to go abroad and defend apartheid, which my political ideology, principles would never allow me. But then I said no, I want to be a diplomat, I mustn't let that deter me from achieving my career goal. So I had a choice. I had to go and work for the British foreign service or work for the Americans. But I never explored it. Very fortuitously for me my career actions got Bob Gosende to give me a call, and Bob made me an offer. And I told Bob, "Bob, look as now that fate has gone my way. I would have liked to be a diplomat but there was no way I could work for my country and I had to put it on the back burner." So I said, "Bob, this is not an easy decision for me because I am newly married." I got married in '62 so I was married ten years. My kids were young. I said, "I must do a lot of thinking about this because if I make the wrong decision my family is going to suffer."

Q: A decision about the offer.

SASSMAN: The job. So he said, "Frank, ok, I will give you two weeks to think about it. You come back to me." Then I thought and my decision was made by I looked at the two societies, the British society, and the American society. I saw the many parallels. Granted there are differences but the many parallels I can draw between the South African and the American society. I read about Martin Luther King and Jesse Jackson, and said, I would like to work for the Americans, and then I accepted.

Q: Was there a choice?

SASSMAN: My credibility as a result of being in diplomatic circles have made me a unique individual in this country. Guys who were cabinet now, I can pick up the phone and say, "Listen, it is pay back time." I opened that door for you. I need to lay open guidance. So it made me a very unique individual in my family, immediate family, in my extended family, and also in South Africa. I can go anywhere in the country and I will run up against people for whom I have opened the door. I always say to them, "I didn't get you the grant. You did things which I noticed and I felt that you should benefit from this, so I merely nominated you." But they say, "I got them the grant. I don't see it that way. I mean Phumzile who was the deputy president she told me, "Frank you opened the door for me when I was a community worker with the western province council of churches. Poralani, these are guys when the change came they came to me. They said, "Frank we need to get to our peer group." They didn't want the grants with constructive engagement. They didn't want to be associated with us. Say Frank, Neville Alexander came to me and said, "Frank I think I am ready to go now," as an example. So you know it is guys, and Hank, I did an electronic dialogue with Hank Cohen who was the assistant secretary of state. I did this dialogue. Hank said to the media, we had Cape Town linked up with the South African parliamentarians, linked up with the media in three other centers in Africa to talk about change in Africa. Where are we now, what is the status. Hank Cohen...

Hank Cohen made a statement in that particular electronic dialogue that I will never forget, but very apt. He said to the guys, the South Africans he said especially to the south African media, he said, "Listen, you guys are being very negative towards change in South Africa. You always are talking about the problems, but you are not offering solutions to the problems. Start focusing on how you are going to resolve the situation. I want to tell you this, the time for change is much nearer than you think. Don't Get caught with your pants down," were his last words.

You know I had a call from , who was it that called me, Bulelani Ngcuka who was very high up. He was the guy the ANC brought into Western to organize the Western Cape you know. Mass media, mass democratic movement in the western cape. He called me. He said, "Frank, you know, that electronic dialogue set us thinking. Can you bring, can you link us up with three specialists in the United States, who are specialists in electoral processes. Because after what Cohen said, we thought, we didn't even focus on what the electoral process we are going to use. I went to my director, at the time my countrymen didn't know who it was. I said to him, "Listen, we must help these guys." This is now we looking at '92, the early 90's where there was the change. They were now talking.

Q:1994.

SASSMAN: Yeah, so they taking with electoral processes now and are having discussions with the South African government. This guy, he said no. They cannot, this is too short. We can't get these guys. I said, "Man, these guys are not going to stop with you." They are going to go to the political office, they are going to go to the ambassador. USIS can look good if we... I went behind his back.. I called Kent Obie.

Q: The director of the Africa bureau at USIA.

SASSMAN: At that time Kent was PAO. But he became the head. So Ken at least saw, I said to Kent, "Look I know the time is short. I concur with that. They wanted to go within two weeks." So I said, "But can't we do an electronic dialup?" He said, "Excellent Frank, we are going to look at this." They lined up Andre Lypot, who was at the University of California, Sam Huntington, and another guy.

Q: Sam Huntington. Another electronic...

SASSMAN: Yeah, yeah. Guys like the ANC now - this was the shadow ANC, Kader Asmal, Albie Sachs. Albie Sachs came to me and he said "What about this horse and pony show that you arranging?" They didn't know about electronic dialogue. I said, and they were having a conference in Stellenbosch. I said, "Ok, we are going now." They lined up those guys and they had the electronic dialogue. Kader Asmal, Dullah Omar, they were all there. So we had this, and you know, we booked an hour. Within the first half an hour, Albie and Kader, and Dullah came to me and said, "Frank, we must apologize. We were taunting you about the horse and pony show. We didn't know about the electronic dialogue. But the guys want to know if you can give us an extra half an hour."

Q: Ha, ha, ha, ha!

SASSMAN: And we had it, and there they discussed. Then these guys came to me and said to me, "Frank, we are not disrespecting you, but we know the trouble you had going direct to the ambassador. We want a dedication to go into act further with these guys." So you see then this is why I was helping my government through my job. I was doing my job but very subtly, I was helping, and I wasn't doing anything wrong, understand. Because that is the idea. You wanted to share the U.S. experience with host country nationals. So many times I did my mission, but in a beneficial way.

Q: Frank, I have known you long enough to know you were always a trouble maker and will always be a trouble maker, but always the trouble gave good results.

SASSMAN: Gave a benefit. So I tell you that to me was a high light, and the fact that these guys would pick up the phone and call, they would say, "Frank we are coming to you." They could have gone to the ambassador., but they come to me and they say how much we approach you.

Q: You mean the Albie Sachs people.

SASSMAN: Yeah, they respected me, and then when we started sending them and the approach to the U.S. government changed and they knew they had to draw on the expertise of the U.S. models, they came, and they came to me.

Q: These were people who were ideologically suspicious of the United States. But who came to understand through your guidance that the models in the United States existed and they needed those models.

SASSMAN: They wanted, Look, why re-invent the wheel. The thing is as I say I was honored then in the sense that I was at the branch office [Cape Town]. I wasn't at the head office. They could have called someone in Pretoria but they called me. And I said, I thought my BPAO at that time wouldn't want to act. I said, "No I am going to call Kent." And Kent will see it the way I see it. And exactly we had a good working relationship and he saw it and now Frank, we must. Same with the Vaal and all this. If I didn't get the support from Pretoria, you know how it works. It goes into the waste bin.

That is why I value having you guys up there and being able to. That I admired about you guys. You always showed an interest outside of your portfolio you know wanting to know this or wanting to know that. But maybe it is not a generalization. I am not saying everybody, but the people I meet, I meet the wrong people. But I don't get any invitations for embassy functions. I understand why, if I am there, the guys all know me, the contacts are going to come to me because we were not just professional contacts; we were friends. That may be good for the mission. So I don't know if that is the reason.

Q: You are a very difficult person.

SASSMAN: Yeah. So I said I just go there to change my check.

Q: Well there is much to be said about the present and how things have changed, but this is all the more important that we understand, we are talking about history here, a bit of narrative history that is extremely important.

SASSMAN: And you now, I know that I became a friend of these guys as opposed to just a contact because on many occasions the ambassador or the BPAO would ask another colleague to call and make an appointment. And that when a big guy comes from Washington, the ambassador would contact me and say "Frank, can you try?" And then I will get the appointment. Because my, and again I won't share this with anybody but I can mention in my interview. I when I had my contact cards for all this computer technology, I had little contact cards. I will say my contact is Dan Whitman. The most important point I would put after I would put Dan Whitman's details is the name of your personal assistant or secretary.

Q: For access.

SASSMAN: Then they would say to you "Hi Jenny can I owe you." "You know they told me so many times Frank you are the only person who makes us visible. Everybody just calls Hello can I speak to Dan Whitman." That got me the entrée, or if I speak to Jenny, "Hi how is the family?" "Ah my little boy broke his leg," and all that. I know that. Next time I call I say, "how's John? How is his leg?" "Oh Frank you impress me again." I always like Jakes said to me once. _____ Are you having an affair with Cathy?" Cathy was the secretary. I said, "Why do you say that?" He says, "When you call, you are the only one and you are making a time to make an appointment," Cathy comes and pleads with me to say why don't you do it over breakfast. Frank has got something important. The guys could never figure out, but that was my little secret. That I had this card and I would always put these things down. That is why I could get an appointment, even the mayor of Cape. She would say Joyce came there, Joyce says please, you must go. Frank has been calling. So it was my way just my personality that interested in people and I am a people person. That is what I would do, and I would never, I mean I am outing it now.

Q: I have to tell you at the Foreign Service Institute people take courses in how to get access to important people, be nice to the subordinate, but most people never learn the lesson. And this you came on all by yourself.

SASSMAN: This focused very heavily on the Group Areas Act which called for the countries to be divided into geographic regions or housing areas for the different ethnic groups. Before they could do that they had to assign a racial classification to every citizen in the country. Now this took various forms, and I will try to put into context and try to explain to you how it was done. If in the case the child would always get the race of the mother. Except where the father and the mother is not of the same race. If you take a white female, if she is married to a white person, the child would be classified as white. If there has been sex across the color line, and the mother is white but the father happens to be colored, African, or Indian, that child would be classified as colored. In the case of the colored woman, the child would always be classified as colored whether the father is white, colored, African or Indian. In the case of the African woman, the child would be classified as and this refers to the Indian.

In the case of the Indian woman the child would be classified if the father is Indian, the child would be classified as Indian. If the father is colored or the father is African, or the father is white, and the mother is an Asiatic woman, the child would be classified as colored. Now if you take the African woman and the child, the father is white, colored or Indian. That child would be classified as colored, and if the father and the mother is African the child would be classified as African. But then you have borderline cases where in all the other cases they are not so much concerned with physical features, but in the case of where the person that has to be classified is a borderline case, in other words he or she claims to be colored, but the features is more African, the person is really dark of complexion, has very short hair, and that is normally the physical features for as we said, Africans. Afrikaner said for the colored for the African. Then they would use cultural differences prevalent between the two groups colored versus African.

Now one of the things they would have if a person comes and he claims that he is colored because it is better to be colored than African because you have more privileges, you know, economic privileges, job privileges etc. So that person will come and he will say that he is colored he is not African. But he has the features of the African. Now the Afrikaner guy interviewing that person will use different things. The first thing they would use is what they call the pencil test. They will take a pencil and the person has short pepper corn hair, they will put the pencil. If the pencil sticks he is African. If the pen goes through he is colored. Then it got around and that is because he is very wise, and he shaved his head so they couldn't use the pencil test.

Then they had other tests that were cultural tests. The person interviewing the person who is very dark of complexion, short hair and looks African but claims to be colored. They will tell him to say certain phrases which the colored and the African will say differently pronunciations or whatever. They would have the one, there is a word you all know, Jackal which is a small animal. They will say to him say that word in Afrikaans. Now the Afrikaans word for Jackal is Jakkals. Jakkals is the Afrikaans word for Jackal. The colored if he is colored he will say Jakkals. If he is African, the African has difficulty he will say Jackolas. If he says Jackolas, he is classified as African. If he says Jakkals, then he is colored. Then there is another phrase I catch the ghost in the dark. Now that is English. You understand that. But then in Afrikaans that would be Ek vang Die spook in die donker. Now that guy who claims to be colored but he looks African, the Afrikaner will ask him to say that. The colored, if they have him classified as colored will say Ek vang any spook in e donker. The African the way he speaks and the cultural difference will say Ek Vang home die spook in die donker. So that is the difference and on that phrase, they also used this with there was a time when there was the prohibition laws that Africans could not buy spirits or alcohol from a bottle store. Because if you are African you are not allowed to buy spirits or wine. But coloreds could. When a guy comes in dark of complexion and short hair, they would use these phrases to determine whether that guy is colored or whether he is African.

Then there was another cultural difference, and that was the person interviewing the person who claims he is colored and not African, he would say to them in English or Afrikaans "How tall were you when you were sixteen years old?" You understand how tall. The African because he grew up mostly in the rural environment and the way they measure horses he will say I was so high and he would show with his hands that way. The colored and the white will show like this.

Q: Ah with the hand flat.

SASSMAN: Now you see that with a horse they always say a horse is 20 hands high.

Coloreds and whites would show the hand horizontal to show the height. And that is another way they would. There was another phrase that sounds a bit complicated. There is a phrase in Afrikaans, "Eighty-eight small potatoes." In Afrikaans you would say "agt en Tagtig ard appels." that is potatoes. Agt en tagtig klein ard appelkis." Now the African has trouble saying this. The colored would say, "Agt en tagtig ard appelkis." But the African cannot say that. He has problems so he would say "tagentagentag." You see the difference. So in that the race will be decided. So I just thought I wanted to show this stupidity. The stupidity in all race...

Q: Now there must have been people who knew this and were able to fake it.

SASSMAN: Yeah, but it was very difficult where you have a culture that you say something in one way, and it was say it fast, you know. Then he catches you up. There were some really interesting incidents. I will give you one incident in Dansani, that is the black town near to East London. This family lived in East London but during some time when the classification took place, the family was struggling. They sent, this was a colored family, and they sent the one daughter to live with her mother's sister. This daughter was young and she lived many years with the mother's sister. Then the mother's sister married a black African guy. So she was classified as African. They reclassified her as black African.

Q: Even though these were not her biological parents.

SASSMAN: The mother's sister was married to an African, and she had herself reclassified as African, but she had the colored daughter of her sister who should have been classified as colored. But they didn't want to say you are living in an African village, so they classified the daughter when they did the general classifications, they classified the daughter as African.

Q: So they could live together.

SASSMAN: Right. She was in an African area. So this daughter when the mother's situation changed she went back to live with her mother in this area in East London. Of course everybody carried an identity document. White, coloreds, and Indians had an identity document, the ID. Africans had to carry the sompass or the pass. Under the influx control laws they couldn't come into the urban areas just as they want to. So when the authorities came around and they asked them for their identity documents, it turned out that the daughter was African and she is living in an area designated for coloreds.

Q: So she had to redesignate.

SASSMAN: No, so they said this daughter cannot live with you. She must get out of the area. She is an African and she is living in a colored area by virtue of this thing that happened.

Q: So once you are "demoted" colored to African, you cannot go back.

SASSMAN: At that time you must now get out. So then the mother and father went to consult an attorney and the attorney said to her, "The only way you can get your daughter to live with you as an African is to build a servant's quarters in the back of your yard. An employer as your domestic servant. Then a colored domestic servant can live in a colored area by virtue of the fact that she is working for a colored family as a domestic servant.

Q: Amazing.

Q: Did you ever meet Helen Suzman?

SASSMAN: Yes, I met Helen in of course. Parliament was part of my portfolio and in working that area, and she was at one time the only female member of parliament. And the only opposition member also. So I had contact with her. When I was studying at the University of California in San Diego, they were showing like they do they show to the students at the universities new releases of the movies so they can go advertise what the films are like. So they showed Cry Freedom. My involvement in Cry Freedom was that I was involved in the beginnings and the gathering of information to make the movie. I had a call from Donald Woods who was the editor of the daily dispatch who skipped the country in the 70's or early 80's I think. He was banned with Steve Biko. He called me and said, "Frank, Sir Richard Attenborough wants to make a movie on South Africa." He didn't know if that was going to be on Steve Biko, but he said he needed to get somebody to get him around. I then told my director and he said, "Oh Frank it is an honor if you can help Sir Richard, so you can go." I introduced Sir Richard with contemporaries of Steve Biko.

Q: Steve Biko was killed in the 70's.

SASSMAN: Yeah, in the 70's.

Q: And this film was the story of Steven Biko.

SASSMAN: Yeah, on the life of Steve Biko. Steve Biko was the father of black consciousness in this country he was a medical student who was expelled and ... In any case I met Sir Richard so he said to me in Cape Town he said to me, "I am not here on my real name. I am using a pseudonym. I didn't because he said the South African filming had invited him to the premier of Gandhi the film which he made before "Cry Freedom."

Because the cinemas were segregated under the Group Areas Act. He didn't want to accept because he was not happy with segregation of audiences, so this is his year to make a film and he doesn't want the authorities to know so he was here as Mr. Green. I took him around. I took him to Crossroads. I took him to the Eastern Cape. He took stills you know and he still said to me, "Frank thank you very much. I have got enough background I can make this fall any way I want. Even if they don't allow me back in the country." When I took him to Peter Jones who was the closest friend of Steve Biko, he was a colored, to his office in Stellenbosch, We didn't know the office was bugged. Peter then called him Sir Richard. The next morning the "Burger," you know the story of the "Burger."

Q: The Afrikaans morning newspaper.

SASSMAN: The daily paper. It was the mouth organ of the Nationalist Party. They picked up the security police listening in to our conversations. The next morning the "Burger" has a story headlines, Sir Richard Attenborough is in South Africa to make a film on the life of Steve Biko. Sir Richard told me he also wants to meet Winnie Mandela because Nelson Mandela was still in prison. This was in the early 80's. So he said to me he is going up to Brantford. Now Brantford is a small African village in the Free State.

Q: This is after you knew that the Burger had run the story.

SASSMAN: Yeah after we knew. So then he went up and he was speaking. Now Winnie being a banned person, you cannot meet, you cannot be two people to give her simultaneously. You need more than two people to get her simultaneously. Two people is allowed but three or more you violate the banning order. So he met with Winnie, and there was a journalist according to Sir Richard standing approximately twenty yards away from where Sir Richard was talking to Winnie Mandela. A Journalists with a conservative white newspaper said he overheard Sir Richard planning with Winnie Mandela the overthrow of the South African government. Now you tell me 20 yards away and obviously speaking softly and

Q: Yes and using listening devices or lying, one or the other.

SASSMAN: Then of course, Sir Richard left. Then when I heard the film was being released in San Diego, I had to see this film because I knew it was going to be banned in our country. Now we under the prohibition laws. And they would have a foolscap sized loose leaf like an encyclopedia on all the banned material. It would be one liners, Title and order. It would have about plus minus 800 pages printed with one line for each. It showed you how many books were banned. Sometimes the censor board would reset a second week and list all the literature. Calendars would be banned. Films would be banned under the prohibition. These things would be banned and all libraries had to have list of what is called Jacobson's, a list of objectionable literature. The libraries have got to check that list against their book stock to make sure that they don't have banned books on the shelves. If you are caught with a banned book, and I am talking about the 70's and 80's you would be fined about 800 Rand, about 80 Dollars. So and sometimes because they cannot, people would fall into the sense of order and object. Sometimes they would look purely at titles. At one time they banned Black Beauty by Ann Sorrel, the story about the horse. The banned it because they saw the word black in the title. The books were banned primarily for political content, for pornography and a lot of sex in the novel and that kind of thing.

Q: Right, let's go back to the Attenborough film in Los Angeles.

SASSMAN: Yeah, so I was sitting and watching this film because I assumed it would be banned. I heard someone say, "Frank, what are you doing in Los Angeles?" George Allen's sister. She went to university in the east to do a memorial, annual memorial lecture. Then she came to the University of California in San Diego to do the memorial lecture at the San Diego. So I said, "I see I am here for the same reason as you. You won't be able to see this movie in South Africa because of the banning laws. The other thing I remember about Ellen Sussman was one of the speeches in parliament she was addressing parliament and one of the national party MP's got up and said, "I don't agree with what you are saying because statistics, if I can bring the statistics in it will prove otherwise." So Ellen Sussman laughed and she aid , "Let me tell you something about statistics. Statistics is like a woman's bikini. It hides and covers up the vital parts and reveals the ephemeral unimportant parts."

Q: She said that right in parliament?

SASSMAN: Right. So she was a person, a real fighter very feisty.

Q: She was amazing and constantly in opposition as you say. I think every day just about that she was in that room.

SASSMAN: She was the only opposition MP.

Q: She was white which is how I guess she was able to survive. But politically how did she survive, because she was all alone in that room.

SASSMAN: I will give you my personal opinion. You see, if any country as South Africa claims to be a Western country, is a one party state, and it has no opposition ,it is very bad. It is bad for investment in the country you see. So the top business people were Anglo-American. They found a sponsor. So I think at that time it was purely to give credibility to the white Nationalist Party. They have an opposition, only one person.

Q: So they permitted an opposition as a safety valve to give the impression of being pluralistic.

SASSMAN: It is good and it is democratic. There is an opposition. One person.

Q: But they were confident that everyone would ignore her.

SASSMAN: Yeah, and what is she going to do, one person against them. But by the end of course the thing grew and at that time it was the progressive federal party. Today they are the official opposition to the Democratic alliance which came out of the PFP, the official opposition to the Party, the ruling party.

Q: So where are we chronologically. We are in the early 80's You were in California on a trip, on a study trip?

:SASSMAN: It was, I did not go under the auspices of the USIS. It was an American exchange program.

Q: But you were in, was it a coincidence that you were in Los Angeles at the time of the premier of the Attenborough film?

SASSMAN: I was doing research at the University of California at San Diego.

Q: Now you had worked on this movie. It was very important for you to see this movie. You knew it would be banned in south Africa, and there was Helen Suzman sitting near you.

SASSMAN: Yeah, and she for the same reason she was also there. It happened that the movie was released at the time when she came to give this memorial lecture. So that was quite an experience and Sir Richard thanked me personally for taking him around and getting... But I must say the fact that office was bugged, Sir Richard obviously was informed back then by Donald Woods, because Donald Woods had a lot of problems with the Security police. He was very paranoid about places being bugged. But when I started speaking to him at the hotel, the Turner's Hotel, he showed me, "Let's go outside." We spoke outside.

SASSMAN: Attenborough was very paranoid about bugging. The next day we are in Peter Jones' office, nobody knowing he spoke there the place was bugged. That is how the Burgher, the security police told the Burgher to publish the story.

Q: After the story came out, how long was Attenborough able to stay in the country?

SASSMAN: After the story I think after he met with Winnie, he ended what he wanted to do, so he left. But he wrote to Donald who was living in exile in the UK because he was banned, living in exile in the UK, and Donald called me to say Sir Richard said to say thank you very much. He has got enough stills and material he can make that film anywhere in the world. He wasn't allowed back into South Africa to make the film. He made it in Harare, in Zimbabwe.

Q: Which is the same terrain.

SASSMAN: Yeah.

Q: Do you know whether he ever returned to South Africa later?

SASSMAN: No

Q: But he had the material thanks to Frank Sassman.

SASSMAN: And he gave me a credit on the fold, under the fold. So it was a very interesting period.

Q: I guess. I should say so. Let's go chronologically. This would have been the early mid 80's I think.

SASSMAN: I was in the States at San Diego in '87.

Q: Your experience with Attenborough was just before then.

SASSMAN: Yeah, well that could have been '86 or early '87 when I took him around. He was making Chorus Line, another movie at the time, but he was doing the research. He had done the research for Chorus Line and they were busy with the movie. He was now doing the research for his next movie which was something on South Africa. But in the beginning he didn't know whether it was going to be the life of Steve Biko, was it going to be on Apartheid or something else.

Q: Now you have mentioned Steve Biko as being the father of Black Consciousness. Any other comments about Steve Biko before we leave that subject.

SASSMAN: Yeah, Steve Biko was the South African authorities were really scared of Steve Biko because he was a very eloquent speaker, very articulate and not scared you know, very assertive in putting his point across. He started from the premise of black consciousness that we cannot have normality in South African society...

Unless we level the playing fields where blacks are equal to whites in this country. So his organization which was AZAPO, he was first AZAPO and then he went to the Black People's congress, the Black Consciousness.

Q: AZAPO is an acronym.

SASSMAN: Yeah. Azanian People's Organization.

Q: Would you say this was the precursor to the ANC? Was there any...

SASSMAN: Oh they are to the left of the ANC.

Q: All of these movements seen as radically left by the regime?

SASSMAN: Yeah. They were banned. They were all banned. So Steve Biko was, a directive was given to the security police that he is a prominent fugitive African leader and he must be taken out. In other words they must kill him. Then he was on his way to a rally in the Eastern Cape and then outside Grahamstown, you know where the old university is in the Eastern Cape. They stopped, the security police stopped the vehicle and arrested Biko and Peter Jones who was the Secretary of the Black Consciousness movement.

Q: Do you know the year?

SASSMAN: In the late 70's. Then Peter Jones was released and he was banned. And also threatened because he was in the cell next to Biko. And they beat up Steve Biko and when they put him in the back of a buggy, this is a small van.

They drove from Grahamstown to Pretoria which is 1500 kilometers. Which would be about 800-900 miles. Just naked in this buggy they drove with him, and he died in Pretoria. It eventually came out that the police beat him to death. He was killed by them. Just one incident that I always remember about Steve Biko and his assertiveness and being prepared to speak out irrespective of who he was talking to. He was being tried at the supreme court at that time which is not a high court in Grahamstown for his political activities. The magistrate at one point in the trial said to him, "Mr. Biko, why do you keep referring to yourself as black when you are actually dark brown?"

Now the black consciousness, they did not accept the term native or colored or whatever. They just saw black and white. So black consciousness was black. He smiled and said, "Your honor with all due respect, why do you refer to yourself as white when you are actually pink?" It just brought the roof down in the court. But that was Steve. He says it as it is you know.

Q: I guess that doesn't make things any easier for him.

SASSMAN: No, he was sentenced.

Q: Meanwhile you are back from California, is that correct?

SASSMAN: Yeah.

Q: Working with USIS again, and thinking back to that period.

SASSMAN: Yeah not the next thing that happened, I told you before I went to the U.S. I was with the Weinberg crisis, it was an NGO non profit. I was involved with that to help the seven kids who were sentenced to various imprisonments.

Q: While you were employed by USIS. Extra curricular activities.

SASSMAN: Yeah, extra curricular. I didn't tell them about that. I did everything behind the scenes. I briefed people but didn't actually participate in the thing. Then when I came back, it was in '87, I came back, what happened after that. Then in the next significant thing that happened in my life was when because of the grapevine and my connections with the ANC, I heard two days, I heard this on the grapevine two days before the release of Mandela I heard this. I went to the Ambassador and informed him that Mandela would be released in two days time. The ambassador was very impressed and he said to me, "Frank if you can go back and ask the ANC leadership who will be planning the release if they can take it to a venue where President Bush Sr. Can be the first international statesman to call him and congratulate him on his release it would be a major coup for the embassy. So Bill Swing was the ambassador. You must know. So Bill said to me, "Frank if you can do that it is a major thing."

I went back to the University of the Western Cape where they were planning all of this and spoke to him sub rosa, spoke to Dullah Omar, explained to them what the ambassador's wish was. So they said, "Frank this would be good." And they are going to make it happen. They in turn asked me if the embassy would lend a bullet proof vehicle to drive Mandela around in the country. I said to them I cannot answer, but I will take your request to the ambassador, which I did. I didn't hear anything. I don't know if it happened or whether they said no they cannot. It is not possible to give a U.S. government vehicle to a civilian. I don't know what happened; I heard nothing. Oh the ambassador then asked me to get the telephone number. So I went back to them and got the telephone number where they were taking Mandela and President Bush called him. That happened. The telephone call happened. They took him to Dullah's house before he spoke to the crowd.

Q: Dullah Omar, later minister of justice.

SASSMAN: He became minister of justice. So this is the way it was described to me by guys who were at the event when he was at Dullah's house. The phone rang and Dullah's daughter who is now an advocate ran to the phone and she came back and she said, "Daddy, there is a man on the telephone. He says he is the President of the United States, and he wants to speak to Mandela." Now you must know Dullah, and Kader Asmal they all laughed thinking it is Dan Whitman playing a joke on them. Dullah went to the phone and it was President Bush. Mandela mentions the incident in his book, "The Long Walk to Freedom." He doesn't mention any names but he mentions that it was at Dullah's house. He says he valued this phone call because the reason he valued it Bush placed him on his list of 27 people that he regularly informs or briefs on international incidents. He valued that because remember he was incarcerated for 27 years and he was out of touch with a lot of things.

Q: Well this is enormous.

SASSMAN: That is the one thing. The other thing he said was that he had a great respect for Bush. He was a man that you can debate with. Bush always took cognizance of the feelings of the person he was interacting with, and that you can leave after the debate or the discussion and still respect him. Those are the two things. I actually have the page number. I think it is 699, but I can look that up in the Long Walk to Freedom.

Q. Now a couple of questions about this. You say you learned two days before. Was there a general sense that this was imminent?

SASSMAN: Yeah there was. Look at what had happened. You see you can't have a person incarcerated for 27 years just released into society. So what they did they allowed him privileges on Robben Island. Then I don't know if they had a special house built in Victor Verster Prison in Paarl. They didn't release him immediately into society. They first took him from Robben Island to Victor Verster where he was allowed more privileges. He had visitors and all that. Then the release was done from Victor Verster Prison.

Q: So everybody knew this would be coming soon.

SASSMAN: No, at the time when I heard it people knew they were going to release him at some time but nobody knew when. So it was a very good news to the embassy because they knew two days before it was going to happen by virtue of me having heard it from senior aides.

Q: Now it was the ambassador's decision that it would be a good thing for the president to be the first one to call. Do we know Whether President Bush had an opinion about this or did he just follow the advice of the ambassador?

SASSMAN: I think when I did this through my BPAO so of course Bill Swing said, "Look, this is good news," when he met with his political officers. Then he said, "If Frank can go and get the ANC echelons to get Mandela to a telephone where President Bush can call him to be the first international statesman to congratulate him it would be a major coup for the embassy in South Africa."

But then what I think he did, and I can't vouch for this. I think he must have communicated this to Washington saying Mandela is going to be released in two days time. I have suggested that we arrange for you as president to call him. I cannot say this with certainty but I think that is what he did. I think if I were ambassador it would put me in good stead.

Q: We really don't know what the attitude was in Washington but the upshot was that they followed the ambassador's advice.

SASSMAN: They agreed and that is what happened. And as I say it happened, and Mandela mentioned it in his book, and I also heard it from ANC guys.

Q: My gosh. Now the perception in the majority population of South Africa towards the U.S. administrations, the various ones was mixed, I think. That is majority population black, colored, those in the anti apartheid struggle had mixed feelings I think, about the U.S. policy. Now do you think that President Bush and the release of Mandela made a very rapid change in people's opinions about the United States and its policy towards South Africa.

SASSMAN: You see, I think that the feelings were mixed with regard to the U.S. you know. There were many people who saw the U.S. as the savior that is going to get them out of the position they are in. There were many people who saw the U.S. like with your Sullivan principles your embargoes, whatever you did. Most of the people in South Africa saw the Sullivan principles and the embargoes as good things that they said at least the U.S. the more radical ones, the AZAPO guys, maybe some guys in the ANC, because to the left of the ANC it is still an imperialist country. Are they genuine, what are they doing, you know that type of thing. So you had mixed feelings. The other thing that was more important to me was how Mandela saw this. He valued the opportunity that Bush placed him on the list of the 27 people that he briefed regularly on international incidents. Mandela just coming out of prison for 27 years, you can think what this meant the top western leader is now going to be calling him and discussing important issues with him. That to me is more important.

Q: Now you have a man who has been a prisoner for 27 years a U.S. president who apparently was very nimble and able to change very quickly from whether you consider him justly imprisoned or not, he was a prisoner. Bush had to be playing within a delicate position I guess because there was Constructive Engagement. There were those in the U.S. who wanted much more harsh treatment of the apartheid regime. It appears that in a very short amount of time President Bush Sr. quickly adapted to the idea of Mandela being the leader.

SASSMAN: Yes, let me answer that. If you remember the ANC was the main liberation struggle movement, right. Then there was a split in the ANC, and the PAC, the Pan Africanist Congress move to the left of the ANC when that organization was formed. Now you had two liberation movements. ANC where they are moving in condo. MKZ. Then you have the Pan Africanist Congress, PAC with APLA, the African People's Liberation Army as the armed struggle. Both of them operated from Tanzania.

Q: This is the PAC.

SASSMAN: The PAC, more socialist than the ANC. So the U.S. chose to identify Mandela as the leader that they will deal with.

Q: Seen as more moderate by the American administration.

SASSMAN: More moderate by the U.S. and the U.S. actually made Mandela. Let's put it that way.

Q: That is a pretty strong statement.

SASSMAN: Yeah, because they accepted him and they pushed him as the Future leader of South Africa you know. There had to be change and the oppression had to end. They identified Mandela as the leader above all the other guys especially Robert Soubouquet. And Robert Soubouquet as a result of that was played down by the international community. He wasn't accepted as Mandela was.

Q: This could not have happened overnight. At what point did the process accelerate?

SASSMAN: It was there all the time. Look, the primary objective of the U.S. and the west was to get the South African government to change. They tried various things. They tried Constructive Engagement and different strategies. But when it came to them getting to the South African, Botha actually started it, the predecessor of de Klerk, this African leader. He started this by talking. But he was very dogmatic and very opinionated, and things didn't go. But de Klerk was the brave one who took the stand. Now I heard I don't know how true it is. It makes sense to me, but I don't know if there is truth in this. When the talking started and they get to have the big indaba in the center area where the ANC in South Africa started talking and working out the new thing. Now I heard from somebody and he said to me that the U.S. and the Soviet Union and others had to force the hand of the South Africa government to force them to start talking to the ANC. As I said I cannot prove this but I just heard people talking about this. And then they said what was done that they came with sanctions, they came with Sullivan principles, all these things leading up to it.

Q: The U.S. working with the USSR?

SASSMAN: Yeah this is what I heard. Let me explain this. What I heard was that they then say they must break or hurt the economy of South Africa because economics rules politics. So what they did was They sort of had to bring, you see our economy is pegged against gold, it was all the years. So I heard that the U.S. and some of the Western powers got together and said if we flood the market with gold, and the U.S. has all it's gold. It doesn't produce that much, so they said if they make an abundance of gold available, gold will drop in value. And it dropped in value and they said the guys flooded the market, and the value of the rand was 22 U.S. cents at that time. You know you can talk until you are blue in the face, but if the economy suffers, and I think what Mandela and Sisulu told them when they were talking as I told you earlier, that if you do not negotiate with our age group in the ANC, you are going to face the youth, and the youth wants an eye for an eye and blood.

Q: Did the U.S. see this is a potent threat, to devaluing the South African currency. Was there ever an overt link to this?

SASSMAN: That is what I say, I didn't hear that, and this is what I heard and it makes sense to me. And immediately when the economy dropped to 22 U.S. cents, the whole thing flowed you know and the talk for change came about. To me it made sense that if you want to hurt somebody, and South Africa was always warned pegging everything against gold in dangerous. That is also a conversation I was in. I don't know how true it is but that is what brought about was the economic change that forced them you know.

Q: So they had a false sense of security because South Africa did produce gold. But South Africa was not the main holder of gold.

SASSMAN: If you look at Fort Knox. So I don't know it makes sense to me that if there is an abundance the price will drop.

Q: What we can substantiate is that de Klerk was an international visitor under the USIA system. Tell us about that because he is quoted as saying that his mind was completely changed about race relations. That doesn't mean not to be simplistic not bad, good, but just different. The whole equation was different for him after he was an official visitor of the U.S. Information Agency.

SASSMAN: And you know that happened I think in the 80's because he was minister of education at the time. He didn't go as president. But it can be sort of the fact that he eventually ended up as president and that visit was important.

Q: He said when he was president that it was looking back his visit in the 80's that opened up, changed the equation, Maybe this made the Stanton talks may have also been a factor in opening up. Now were these talks secret talks?

SASSMAN: No they were open to the press. You are talking about the talk when the ANC met with...

Q: Now you were selecting IVs at that time. Do you remember the year?

SASSMAN: I think that he was nominated by a political officer but it was in the 80's. It could be the political officer in Cape Town, than that would be embassy nomination. It wouldn't be a USIS nomination. But I worked on his program. I worked on that. Because there was Barend du Plessis. He was minister of finance.

Q: Well what you worked on can you tell us more what your job was?

SASSMAN: Sometimes I have to do the nomination with the political officer being the nominee. Sometimes the political officer would do the nomination himself. Sometimes I would have to go with the political officer and the BPAO to the branch public affairs officer to deliver the letter. Then I would write up the program suggestions by consulting the political officer, if he was a MP who nominated him.

Q: Did you interview De Klerk before he left for the U.S.?

SASSMAN: You see I can't remember if it was the early 80's I was doing the IV program, the IV nominees. I can remember the process of the visa you know but I can't remember the nomination which I think the political officer did by himself. But program suggestions I think I had to contact the political officer at the time to get that and write it up because he would send whatever, and we would do the cable.

Q: And you are in the early 80's. How many IVs would there be per year from South Africa?

SASSMAN: About 30, plus or minus.

Q: De Klerk. We are sitting here with the man who processed de Klerk's nomination which changed the world. Do other individuals come to mind as key or interesting international visitors from that period?

SASSMAN: Well I worked on Barend du Plessis who was minister of finance. I worked on his. His IV [Immigrant Visa]. I worked on the IV [International Visitor program] of Willem Heath, the guy who became the head of the Heath investigative unit into corruption in government.

Q: IVs were not the only thing you were doing. You were planning public meetings in Cape Town. You were dealing with Fulbrights I think. Maybe that was Ron Hendricks.

SASSMAN: Yeah, Ron took it over from me, but when I started moving from the library I did the whole exchange program, both the import and the exchange program Ron was full librarian, and then Ron was promoted into the program.

In the early 80's I was doing the Amparts [American Participants - expert speakers brought from the U.S. to South Africa]. I was doing Fulbright. I was doing the IVs, the exchange programs and Ron was the full librarian. Then I think It was in the late 80's and Ron was promoted from full librarian to cultural programs. Then we were sort of sharing it. It was very haphazard. Then with one BPAO he said no. He wants to separate the cultural program. Say in other words say have the person doing the programming. The programmer and the other one would do the cultural exchanges. So then he said that look what we do is we take one person in charge with the end part of the programming, and that was me. And then Ron was in charge of the exchanges. Then they gave each one, each programmer had sort of a portfolio, like I did social involvement and politics and government. Now I would do all the programming on the overall responsibility for the programming, but I would be my personal responsibility would be falling in social involvement in politics and government. Ron would be overall responsible for the cultural exchanges. In other words coordinating that like I do the programming. But his area of specialty would be academia and labor. So then if it is now exchanges than all the programs falling under politics and government and social involvement I would handle that. I would nominate for that with Ron coordinating. Petra was now in the media, Erfu was media, so any exchanges in the media she would handle that reporting to Ron. So the same would apply like for programming. I would be the overall coordinator for programming. Ron would be responsible for programming imports in academia and labor. Pietro would be responsible for imports in the media.

Q: Now in those days programming of Amparts generally did not involve very large audiences. They used to be meeting with ministers and academics.

SASSMAN: One on one appointments.

Q: So what was your strategy then to have this have an impact on the country because such a small number of people were involved. This was before I-pods and Facebook and all that.

SASSMAN: The way it worked, we had campus wide lectures. Where the Ampart would go to UCT and have a campus wide lecture. We would go to the SRC and say do you want. Most of our programs were seminars, round table discussions and symposia. Like you would have, the other way we would use Amparts, if UCT the lawyers for human rights, they had an international conference on human rights. So they would contact me and say, "Frank we are doing this, is there a good person you could bring from the U.S. to speak on your model for human rights at this international conference?" That is another way to get the message of the model, the U.S. model across. Then we would have one on one appointments like I did with Deval Patrick who came out as an Ampart and get him to meet with the minister of justice to have a one on one with his key guys in the ministry of justice. So those are the ways a permutation of seminars, round table discussions,. Even if we couldn't get a speaker out here we would opt for electronic dialogue. Again we would get the parliamentary portfolio committee on justice to speak about legislation pertaining to asset forfeiture, with specialists in the U.S.

Q: We are now in 2009. Hillary Clinton is Secretary of State and she has made it clear to the world that she believes in mass communication with as many people simultaneously as possible. This is a very new approach. Thinking back to the 80's and early 90's even where many of the discussions were with select audiences, it was one on one. Did you feel that the purpose of these on the part of the U.S. government was to convince South Africans about an American point of view, or was the purpose to work together for some common goal. Or were both things part of the program?

SASSMAN: It was the target rifle approach as opposed to the shotgun. Where we would get the appropriate person or people who can be influential in using that particular U.S. model to get legislation here. It would be a more targeted approach. Like I said, take for instance the portfolio committee on justice. We would get them to speak or interact with a person on asset forfeiture and they would speak directly to those two or three using electronic dialogue first and then the whole committee going to interact with their peer group in there, there were 22 members of that committee. So it was more that kind of approach as to the large audience so it was smaller but more high powered.

Q: So this was a unique historic opportunity because you were really into nation building even before 1994. You had institutions being built. You had laws actually transforming the society so that this would not be possible without the historic opportunity that you had.

SASSMAN: I had really enjoyed my work with USIS in the late 80's and early 90's. I will tell you why. Because I was doing my job as an employee of the U.S. government and simultaneously I was doing significant work for my own government. Say when the new government came into power. The constitutional assembly was established. Now the constituent assembly was the 400 members of the House of Assembly and the Senate. At that time we still had the Senate. You know the Senate was abolished and the National Council of Provinces was established. But while we had the Senate and the National House of Assembly it became very important that these two bodies became the constituent assembly

Q: We are in the early 90's at this point.

SASSMAN: Yeah, we are looking at early 90's now. I would say late 80's early 90's. that is when the new parliament was established. That was in 1990, before '92.

Q: '92 was the release of Mandela. '94 was the election.

SASSMAN: So I am talking about '94 now. But before that even, let's even go back a little into the late 80's. There change was, people were talking about change, but they don't know when it was going to happen. As I said to you that was the time when we had that big interest, significant electronic dialogue with Hank Cohen speaking to the media in Africa.

Q: Let's tell this story. It is a very important story.

SASSMAN: Yeah. So Hank Cohen did the first thing. It was an electronic dialogue between Washington.

Q: Was he Assistant Secretary at that time.

SASSMAN: Assistant secretary of State for African Affairs. That was that time. And he was the chief panelist for this electronic dialogue which was on changing in Africa. We also had a linkup with Pretoria. A lot of our senior USIS guys and some embassy people were there. Then we had Washington linked up. Then it was also a link up in Africa. It was a four or five point linkup.

Q: Other countries.

SASSMAN: Yeah other African countries because it was speaking to the media in Africa. This is where as I said he focused on the thing addressing the media in South Africa saying that South Africans are very critical of what is happening in their country, talking about problems but lacking to discuss...

, he was first AZAPO and then he went to the Black People's congress, the Black Consciousness.

Q: AZAPO is an acronym.

SASSMAN: Yeah. Azanian People's Organization.

Q: Would you say this was the precursor to the ANC?

SASSMAN: Oh they are to the left of the ANC.

Q: So they existed at the same time.

SASSMAN: Yes. It was the same time but they were to the left of the ANC, you know calling for nationalization. A lot of guys were first with AZAPO and the Black Consciousness movement.

SASSMAN: Yeah. They were banned. They were all banned. So Steve Biko was, a directive was given to the security police that he is a prominent fugitive African leader and he must be taken out. In other words they must kill him. Then he was on his way to a rally in the Eastern Cape and then outside Grahamstown, you know where the old university is in the Eastern Cape. They stopped, the security police stopped the vehicle and arrested Biko and Peter Jones who was the Secretary of the Black Consciousness movement.

Q: Do you know the year?

SASSMAN: That must have been I think it was in the late 70's. Then Peter Jones was released and he was banned. And also threatened because he was in the cell next to Biko. And they beat up Steve Biko and when they put him in the back of a buggy, this is a small van.

Q: Yeah, the loading area is open.

SASSMAN: They put him in this buggy and drove from Grahamstown to Pretoria which is 1500 kilometers. Which would be about 800-900 miles. Just naked in this buggy they drove with him, and he died in Pretoria. It eventually came out that the police beat him to death. He was killed by them. Just one incident that I always remember about Steve Biko and his assertiveness and being prepared to speak out irrespective of who he was talking to. He was being tried at the supreme court at that time which is not a high court in Grahamstown for his political activities. The magistrate at one point in the trial said to him, "Mr. Biko, why do you keep referring to yourself as black when you are actually dark brown?" Now the Black consciousness, they did not accept the term native or colored or whatever. They just saw black and white. So black consciousness was black. He smiled and said, "Your honor with all due respect, why do you refer to yourself as white when you are actually pink?" It just brought the roof down in the court. But that was Steve. He says it as it is you know.

Q: I guess that doesn't make things any easier for him.

SASSMAN: No, he was sentenced.

Q: The Biko trial.

SASSMAN: I wasn't at the trial. I read this I think it was in a book or something. Because the Daily Dispatch was at that time was I would say the most outspoken newspaper.

Q: Was that national or Cape?

SASSMAN: No it was based in East London in the Eastern Cape and was predominately distributed in the Eastern Cape.

Q: There was relative freedom of expression in the Daily Dispatch.

SASSMAN: Yeah.

Q: Or they just took it. They didn't...

SASSMAN: Look, there was freedom of expression but it was limited. I will give you an example. Oliver Tambo was in exile in the UK. Tony Heard was the editor of the Cape Town Times, I am talking now about the late 70's early 80's. He went and he did an interview with Oliver Tambo in London. His mother had to have an operation and he went there. And then Donald Woods arranged for him to do this interview. Tony came back, consulted with people, and at that time the law said you cannot quote a banned person in any newspaper, literature. They will ban the book if he is quoted in there. So Tony knew what the situation was. A very brave thing he did. When he came back two days later, he published the whole question answer interview verbatim. In the Cape Times. The English Morning daily newspaper.

SASSMAN: Tony Heard published, and he knew that he is going to be in trouble, and he knew that it was under the law there was freedom of expression but you are not allowed, let's say limited freedom of expression. The next day the security police came to interrogate him, and Tony was arrested and he was kicked out of the paper because you know the editorial board of the owners were still very conservative. And he as an editor was a prodigy of Donald Woods, who was very liberal. But he knew what he was doing. This is going to happen. So Tony was kicked out as the editor of the Cape Times.

Q: Is that the worst thing that happened to him?

SASSMAN: Yes. Because he did that to freelance to survive.

Q: So he has a wife and lost his job. Steven Biko was beaten to death. There is a difference there.

SASSMAN: So and then he came back. He became the somebody who writes the speeches for the minister, Speech writer for the minister. So he became the speechwriter for Kader Asmal who was the minister of education, and then Kader became minister of water affairs and he took Tony over with him.

Q: This was after Mandela became president?

SASSMAN: Yeah in the new regime.

Q: Kader Asmal, an important name that will be referring to because he had various portfolios.

SASSMAN: Yeah, he was chairman of the national executive committee of the ANC which governed, you know they were crucial as far as governing and deciding policy.

Q: At the early stage, but later became a member of government.

SASSMAN: He was a minister of education and a member of parliament, then he became minister of water affairs. He is also a constitutional expert. He was a professor of constitutional, Leftin Island for all this time in exile.

Q: OK, so major events, newspapers finding their way, testing the limits.

SASSMAN: Yeah, they challenged that all the time but it was a limited freedom of expression with the banning, and things like that and certain people wouldn't be allowed to be quoted.

Q: You might remember when Deval Patrick came in about '96, when he was working in the Clinton prosecutor.

SASSMAN: Deputy Attorney General. I first thought of Deval Patrick I think it was the mid 90's. It was during a time when we were preparing for a black history month program. I normally as part of the black history month program through electronic dialogue with an appropriate specialist in the United States. I saw Time Magazine and I think Deval was on the cover of Time Magazine. I had no knowledge of him. When I read about the man I thought I would like to include him through USIA as a panelist on the U.S. side for this electronic dialogue. I successfully recruited Deval Patrick through USIA for the February black history month program he was our panelist for the U.S. side.

Q: Electronic.

SASSMAN: Yeah. And what his presentation really impressed not only me but my American counterparts and South Africans. Immediately myself and the branch public affairs office spoke and I said, "Look I would like to include him as an American participant to physically come out to South Africa." My branch public affairs officer at USIS agreed and we contacted our Pretoria office who also agreed. Duvall Patrick came out as an American participant. I programmed him to do a round table discussion. It was on civil right legislation he did a round table discussion. One of my one on one appointments that I set up for him was with the minister of justice.

Q: Dullah Omar.

SASSMAN: Minister Dullah Omar, in 120 Plein Street which is the headquarters housing, the parliamentary building housing all the ministers for the various portfolios. At that meeting was the minister Dullah Omar, one of the senior staff members who he sent the moment. The chief legal advisor to the South African government and two other individuals. Dullah was, the minister of justice was very impressed with Deval and who had the experience of monitoring and seeing to the implementation of civil rights legislation in the Americans with Disabilities Act in the office of the Attorney General at that time. When Deval Patrick left the room to tend to something, while he was gone the minister of justice gave a nod and said, "We need this guy, and you guys must try and bring him out here again." Ok, we came back and the minister was then telling Duvall Patrick with the change from the White government to a black government, the White government at the time was scared that the black minister of justice was now going to get at people implemented by their policies.

Q: Retribution.

SASSMAN: Yeah. So he said to Deval in order to put in place a mechanism that will prevent this at that time before the change of the new government, the ANC government

We had four provinces and each province had a white attorney general. The old regime, the Nationalist Party Regime gave carte blanche powers to these four attorneys general to decide who has to be prosecuted. So they had yea or nay as far as prosecution.

Q: These were white attorneys general from the previous regime.

SASSMAN: From the previous regime, who headed the four provinces that we had at that time. So Dullah's problem was, the minister of justice's problem was, he said that if these four attorneys general refused to prosecute a particular person, hypothetically let's say a person who was involved in the apartheid regime, and then Dullah if he wanted that person prosecuted had to over rule and interfere. Then they accused the minister of interfering in the autonomy of the judiciary.

So Dullah said to Deval that is my problem. I don't want to interfere. So Deval said to him, "That can be overcome. Why don't you make a political appointee and appoint a super attorney general which can overrule these four attorneys general and you as minister won't have to interfere." That is how the national prosecuting authority came into power. Dullah asked Deval will you help us with the legislation? Deval said it is dependent on Frank's organization. I went in and through my Cape Town office and Pretoria requested that we bring out Deval Patrick to help the minister of justice with this legislation for the super attorney general now called the national prosecuting authority. Then I did a program for....

Q: Was this an administrative change in the ministry or was it a judicial change, the creation of this post?

SASSMAN: No it was the minister of justice asking or drafting legislation to be tabled in Parliament that we now create an office for the national prosecutor. He saw it as a way of taking the carte blanche powers away from the attorneys general. You don't even hear about them now. It is just the national prosecuting authority. So then we went in and requested through Cape Town, USIS and Pretoria and it was arranged that Duvall was coming out. In the interim I was called by Barney Pityana who was at that time the chairperson of the Human Rights Commission.

Q: And Barney Pityana stepped in.

SASSMAN: And then Barney Pityana must have heard from Dullah so he called me and asked if they could also meet with the human rights commission to look at drafting anti discrimination legislation. Which he agreed to. So he came out for two or three weeks to work with the minister of justice, to also work with the human rights commission, and I think there was another body that they worked with. That was Deval Patrick's contribution to anti discrimination legislation, and also the creation of the National Prosecuting Authority position.

Q: He created it or the thought of the idea.

SASSMAN: He worked it out. He actually suggested that.

Q: You mentioned ADA earlier, the Americans with Disabilities Act which is also anti discrimination.

SASSMAN: That was part of his portfolio. Now I think I am not sure about this but I think I took him to the South African counterpart of the South African disabilities association in East London. Yeah, it was the USAID money. OK that, and then what was the other thing about Deval now.

Q: OK was the super attorney general; there was the anti discrimination legislation, Barney Pityana, Human rights commission, disability legislation, and there may have been other things. OK and continuing Deval Patrick worked on another area in addition to anti discrimination legislation. He also drafted his version of what he thought should be an affirmative action plan. Now what came of that?

SASSMAN: Yeah, I don't know much about the actually. Maybe that program was run nationally, so I was not that much involved in it, but I think it is interesting when Dan mentioned it to me that now with Terror Lekota the former minister of defense breaking away from the ANC and forming a new organization, COPE, Congress of the People, which has becoming the significant opposition to the ANC. The ANC will still win the election but they are going to lose a lot of votes to COPE. One of the things, Terror Lekota is the president of this organization, and he has got a deputy, Shaloe who was the premier for the Gauteng area under for the ANC.

Q: Gauteng which is the new name for the old area that was called Transvaal, or part of the old Transvaal, which includes Pretoria for example and Johannesburg. Terror Lekota now president of COPE.

SASSMAN: Right, and what is significant about Terror Lekota he is saying, he is agreeing with what Deval said in that paper or what he wrote on affirmative action, suggestions on affirmative action.. Terror Lekota in actual fact is agreeing with that, and he is saying that the implementation of our present affirmative action program, he questions that. He says that it is not only the black who has been disadvantaged; there are other minority groups that have been disadvantaged, and the should have a re-look at the affirmative action program. I think it is important that Duvall should know about this.

Q: Now what was it about Deval's plan and I can remember what I can remember but you will remember your side of it. What was it about Deval's plan which Lekota believes has been set aside. Deval made some proposals to the ANC in about 1996 or 1997 something like that. The ANC took part but not all of his suggestions. Now Lekota is saying the ANC has put the emphasis on the wrong side.

SASSMAN: Yeah. Lekota is saying that first of all the affirmative action is too black. That is the one thing he is saying. The second thing he is saying is why isn't that 95% of blacks, 90-95% of blacks in public office under the ANC regime is ANC. He is questioning that also. I can't remember al but this is the kind of thing which, and that thing of quotas which was Deval also challenged in his suggestions, so I think it is important that maybe Deval should get in touch with Terra.

Q: Deval is a little busy these days, as he is governor of Massachusetts.

SASSMAN: And Terror is equally busy as head of his party.

Q: We could arrange an electronic dialogue.

SASSMAN: Exactly, why don't we do it. Let's do some programming right now.

You know Dan, I say I could see a program miles away. But my wife always checked me. I was too busy. Because I couldn't help it. As I worked I could just see programs.

Q: That is like seeing ghosts or hallucinations that are just there. That is something marvelous. Now what do you think are the chances of COPE?

SASSMAN: COPE is not going to oust the ANC, but they are setting people thinking. Terror is heating this thing on the high moral ground. I mean they chose the guy who was I think the president of the Methodist Church in South Africa, a clean guy coming with no baggage to be president, the elected president of COPE. He is also saying that if anybody messes up, does something wrong, go clear yourself in the court. We are not going to protect you as COPE because you are a COPE member, like the ANC is doing all the time, right. They defend these guys. Like look at this Mamallia, this young ANC youth league guy saying the courts mustn't do the wrong thing with the president ZUMA. Now this is not respecting...

Q: Political interference in the judicial process. Tell me about that.

SASSMAN: Yeah, there is a lot of that by the Zuma camp. You saw that everything

Like they sort of interfered. It was political interference where the chair person or the head of the National Prosecuting Authority, Pikoli.

Q: Now the super...

SASSMAN: Well he is the suspended director of the National Prosecuting Authority. He is adamant that Zuma, the president of the ANC should be prosecuted for corruption charges. Because of that they suspended him. They found trumped up charges against him and suspended him.

Q: The party.

SASSMAN: The party, the ANC.

Q: Wait. How can a party displace the head of a judicial system.

SASSMAN: Wait, let me explain to you. At the time this came up, the acting president of the ANC was Motlanthe. Then he became president. According to him which Pikoli the NPA challenges, he says he has got the right to sack him. Pikoli says he doesn't have that right.

Q: So Motlanthe did this.

SASSMAN: Motlanthe suspended. And he is saying to Motlanthe before you sack me, postpone the appointment of the new NPA director. Give me a chance to prove my innocence. Because what happened the process was that Parliament appointed a commission of inquiry into the suspension of the National Prosecuting Authority's director, Pikoli. So Frene Ginwala, I think you remember, she was the speaker of parliament. Frennie was the chair of that commission, and she recommended that she didn't see this man doing anything wrong, and his job should be given back. So then Motlanthe overruled them. I believe that as president he has the right to overrule the verdict of a commission of inquiry appointed by parliament.

Q: But he did so.

SASSMAN: He did that. So now he is on the verge of Pikoli being sacked and he is going to appoint a new director. Now if he appoints the new director it is going to be a Zuma man. What if he drops the charges. Can you imagine what the western world is going to say. Because there are about 17-20 charges of corruption against Zuma.

Q: And rape. I don't know if that had been settled.

SASSMAN: Well the rape thing he was acquitted on that.

Q: So what you are saying really is that Motlanthe is a Zuma person.

SASSMAN: Yeah, his deputy. You see Zuma chose him because Zuma is not an intellectual. He is the brains. That is why Zuma is very shrewd. He gave Motlanthe the caretaker position so he can have time to focus on his corruption charges.

Q: This is the new head of the ANC after the tumultuous meetings of a year ago. And then he appointed Motlanthe president.

SASSMAN: Yeah, he appointed him as president of the country because he wanted time to get his corruption charges sorted out. Also if Motlanthe is president, caretaker president now, it is obvious Zuma will become the president for the full election term.

Q: OK, now this is all possible because Mbeki resigned.

SASSMAN: They kicked him out; he didn't resign. They forced the issue.

Q: I mean they kicked him out as head of the party. Did he not resign?

SASSMAN: No, they kicked him out as head of the country. He was president of the country and they kicked him out. I am talking about Mbeki now. They kicked him out. They recalled him.

Q: A vote of no confidence?

SASSMAN: Yeah, and because you see he went on with something to do with justice also ruled, but they kicked him out as president of the country.

Q: OK, leaving a vacuum which was filled with the Zuma-Motlanthe group.

SASSMAN: Yeah, so now Motlanthe is now the president but only for eight months because there is an election. April 22 is the election. So then his term expires.

Q: But meanwhile Zuma has been able to get Motlanthe to suspend a judge who was going after Zuma.

SASSMAN: No, to suspend the director of the National Prosecuting Authority.

Q: Right, not a judge, the prosecutor.

SASSMAN: He was the director of the NPA, National Prosecuting Authority.

Q: Let's get back to your USIS programs and maybe Deval Patrick. You are saying that COPE, this new...

SASSMAN: Yeah. COPE was the new party that is going to fight in the elections the upcoming elections.

Q: You said to repeat the importance of Deval Patrick's legacy in the COPE program.

SASSMAN: Yeah, when Deval Patrick was asked to suggest legislation referring to affirmative action he made suggestions on that. He was not happy with the way it was implemented what they finally came up with, what the ANC and the government finally came up with. Now at the moment Terra McColter the former minister of defense who is now the deputy head of COPE is also not happy with the implementation of the affirmative action program policies.

Q: OK now I take it that he has reached this conclusion independently on his own.

SASSMAN: Yeah, the program is in operation now for how many years, plus minus ten years. He is saying no he is not happy because the black is not the only minority group or disadvantaged group in this country. There are other minorities who are also disadvantaged and should be part of the affirmative action program. He includes the white Afrikaner who is also a minority. I was quite impressed and seeing he and Deval Patrick as maybe seeing eye to eye. They are both in opposition to the current policy as implanted on affirmative action. And Mbeki saying maybe they should get together. Because Terror is saying very interesting things. He says freedom songs. Why do we only have Nkosa freedom songs. The diversity of our societal structure must be reflected in our freedom songs. This should be a free country. We have 11 official languages. This is why the White Afrikaners are liking Terror.

You see the ANC every time something as the COPE does something the ANC challenges or they have got to find a way to try to stop it. Now if COPE is not a threat to them why are they going this route? Terror is saying things which people who are not black-black want to hear. And now he has got Boesak, ok, Alan Boesak his name was tarnished by the fraud charges again. What happened with Boesak, Boesak was head of the Institute for Social Justice right. Boesak got a lot of money from the Danes, the Scandinavians, to fight political trials of activists.

Q: Back in the Struggle period.

SASSMAN: In the Struggle period. Now when he did that, that was the time when the South African government wanted to pause the foreign funding bulb. It was most of the money for that kind of activities came from outside the country. And the government wanted to control this by saying money should come through them. Now I was with an organization at that time the Weinberg Crisis. We couldn't have a banking account because we also helped with political trials, and the money came and you couldn't put it in the bank. When I took the chair then I got scared of this. I would say how do you vindicate yourself when it comes to accounting? Because you haven't got a bank account to put the money in the bank because you don't want the government. Now I know what we did and what Alan must have done is if he gives money for the trial of Dan Whitman who is a political activist.

Q: Guilty!

SASSMAN: No, he gives the money and what happens he puts down he bought curtains for the offices. You understand. That will pass with the government. But he can't say 25,000 went for the defense of Dan Whitman a political activist who was accused. So that is what they called struggle bookkeeping.

I got scared when I was chair because we kept the money for our organization in the safe of one of the executive members of Weinberg Crisis who was the owner of the Laxerama Cinemas in Weinberg. So there was no, the money was just put in it. It just disappeared. Now you get worried you know, do you want to be involved in that. So that was the kind of thing Alan. I am not saying the guy is as pure as silk you know. But I am saying you have got to take cognizance of those things you know. It was a time of struggle. Then there were other problems. The other problems was because the overseas funders were concerned is my money going to reach the intended destination, what they did again they assigned conduits in South Africa. The conduits role was, like Mavis Taylor who was in theater, she was an icon in theater. They would send the money to Mavis Taylor. They would send a check for 500,000. She in another correspondence they would say Mavis, 500,000 is coming. Or 100,000 for X organization. B must get 10,000.

Q: Pass-through organization.

SASSMAN: Right. Now some people who were conduits were playing the waiting game saying the check is in the post. If they get that money they couldn't put it into a bank account because it is a check for 500,000, but it has got to go to eight or ten organizations. Now if they leave that 500,000 in the bank for three months.

Q: To get interest.

SASSMAN: It is a lot of money. What happens to the interest. It is all question marks. Then you find every time you say I am still waiting for the check. Then when you finally pay out the 500,000 what happens to the interest?

Q: You keep it.

SASSMAN: You know I am just saying that is not an easy cut and dry thing. Now Alan also did something that I wouldn't see as fraud, but in economic circles it is seen as fraud. I am a donor, and I give you half a million to buy tapes for voting education. Now if you want to do something else with that money you owe it to me as a donor to come to me and say Frank, I had a re-think. I think it is better if we buy a couple of video cameras and we make tapes. The money will go much further, and I set up a little studio, you know.

Q: It is called reprogramming.

SASSMAN: Right. Now without consulting the donor it can be seen as fraud by people. Now Alan did that with voting education. Apparently it was something his wife was running the studio. In other words he still used the money for that but it was not as originally. So that is the kind of thing. So I say the thing with Alan, and he served his time. He was pardoned. I take that with a pinch of salt. So now Alan spoke at the Ashley Creel Lecture at the University of the Western Cape. This was the other Allen who is actually to the left of the ANC now. And there Alan made his come back. He criticized and tore the ANC to pieces. And COPE included him as their main candidate for the premiership in the Western Cape. Every province had a premier. Alan is a damn good orator. He can sway an audience. That scares the hell out of, who is the ANC going to put up against Alan Boesak in the Western Cape.

Q: OK so Boesak went through this difficult period. You say he was judged and went to jail.

SASSMAN: Went to jail. He finished the sentence and then he got a pardon from the ministry of justice or whatever.

Q: He got a pardon retroactively.

SASSMAN: Yeah, cleared his name. They took the charge away. He is out to make a point with the ANC because he feels the ANC deserted him when he needed them. So this is a strong point in COPE's favor. You see the ANC has never won the Western Cape in an election They have never because the first election as I told you the government scared the colored with the communists.

Q: What was it that the old government did to convince cape coloreds to vote against the ANC?

SASSMAN: The surprise of the first democratic election in the country with regard to the results of the election in the Western Cape was that the majority of the colored, the colored is in the majority in the ethnic group in the Western Cape voted for the oppressor, the former oppressor the Nationalist Party. I tried to figure out what was it that brought this about. In trying to analyze this, I realized that the Nationalist Party knew the colored voter, or the colored person much better than anybody else. And they knew that with the so-called colored the religion was crucial in their lives. The poorer the person, the closer the person lives to that where his religion. When the Nationalist Party studies the less proportional representation less for the ANC, they saw that the first 50 members were members of the communist party or had communist leanings. In their campaign speaking to the colored they said, "Do you know that the first 50 members of the ANC proportional list are either communist or have strong communist leanings? Do you know what is going to happen to your church?" The communists are not religious and church going. This I think, was the thing that swung the colored voter to vote for the former oppressor. I can't think of anything else.

Q: Could you also explain the importance of these lists, because it is a different system form the one we know in the U.S. the proportional lists.

SASSMAN: a proportional representation voting process, what happens is each party gives a list in priority order like in the case of the national vote for the national assembly. There are 400 members in the national assembly. Each party will submit a list of 400 members that if they win the election then they look at what percentage of the electorate voted for that particular party. If it happens to be the ANC and 60% of the electorate voted for the ANC, 60% of the 400 members for the national assembly in parliament will be ANC members.

Q: This would be determined by their priority ranking.

SASSMAN: In the priority rank

Q: As determined by the party, not by the voters.

SASSMAN: Yeah. The party will draw up the list and the party will do the ranking.

Q: That is why the nationalist strategy of actually truthfully saying that the top 50 people on the list, this would have been in 1994 I believe.

SASSMAN: Yeah, will go into parliament.

Q: Would be the type of political ideology that would not favor the church. Now building on that then, the COPE do I understand that you are saying COPE can actually have a chance of ruling the Western Cape in the next election because the ANC never did.

SASSMAN: Yeah, you see the ANC never won the majority vote in the provincial vote. There are three votes, the local government, the provincial and the national. Now when the provincial vote for the province, they never won the Western Cape. That is why the smaller parties, the DA is the main opposition and freedom front, all the other parties, they form an alliance. And because the ANC did not get an overwhelming majority as they got in the other provinces when the opposition formed an alliance they were the majority. So they were...

Q: This is why COPE is such... Now we are having an election in two months.

SASSMAN: Now COPE is going to take away a lot of the ANC votes. So they won't win nationally you know, but as a province the Western Cape vote is crucial because the ANC wants to win the Western Cape and COPE is going to hurt them by taking a lot of their votes away. If they form an alliance then COPE I think will have to go in with the smaller parties to form an alliance. It depends now on whether COPE is going to get more votes than the DA who is the official opposition with an alliance formed with the smaller parties.

Q: Now getting back to Boesak. You are saying that COPE has recognized in Boesak an orator, a person of star appeal. His name has been cleared, and it is COPE who went after Boesak to say will you be our candidate for the Western Cape.

SASSMAN: COPE put the suggestion to him and a day or two ago he accepted that he will run. He will be their candidate.

Q: So this is going to be very interesting.

SASSMAN: That depends now if COPE has the majority vote now. Not the majority but becomes the official opposition and can form an alliance with the rest of the parties. You see if COPE gets the most votes second to the ANC. No, not second to the ANC,

Q: Second to everyone else.

SASSMAN: If COPE got enough votes and then they formed an alliance then they have more votes than the ANC, then they become the government of the day.

Q: You could have Boesak as a major political leader in this part of the country.

SASSMAN: Yeah, he will be premier.

Q: Taking with him the ideas about affirmative action that seem to coincide with speaker Deval Patrick.

SASSMAN: Yeah, look if COPE becomes the main force in the alliance then Terror is going to come with his policy on affirmative action which is contrary to the ANC's national policy. The other thing you know like the BEE, Black Economic Empowerment. Now that is another affirmative action program where you empower the black economically. Now they say you can form BEE companies, but if you form a BEE company it is going to be shared and open. People own shares. The idea of BEE is to empower the black person in the street to hold shares in a fairly large company. Now with BEE policy what should be done, they say that 50% of the shareholders in a BEE company should be the person in the street who has two, five or six thousand he wants to invest in shares.

Q: Small investors.

SASSMAN: Eighty percent of them should be small investors, the person in the street.

Q: Should be. Is there any rule about this?

SASSMAN: This is the policy. Twenty percent can be the guys who can put in 41 million. The big guys, but only 20% so that the small share holder controls the company. Now they found that it is the other way around. The Franklin Sons, the _____ the big guys who have the money they hold 80% of the shares and only 20% are owned by. So they are controlling the company. There is now the Chapman's Peak plaza, the tall gates that is owned by a BEE company where the majority of the share holders, the majority of the shares are owned by the big guys. The small business person only owns, the small investor only owns 50 or 40%. So the law is one thing, but the implementation or the practical side of business is different.

Q: Now the BEEs was this a statues or was this a, I mean is it a policy?

SASSMAN: It is a policy. The whole question of empowerment. The black must be empowered economically. Right, the other thing with affirmative action is the policy in the work place where the person is elevated and not only working at labor but the upper management should be. Affirmative action should see that it is not so pale. That there is more blacks in it. So you find that this is happening but it is such that the implementation has a big question mark next to it. This is also something that Terra is speaking about. So there is a lot of things that he is saying that is... And you know the Afrikaners in the rural areas are packing COPE meetings OK. Terra is saying things that they want to hear all the time.

Q: So Lekota is saying that the ANC has turned away form the original ANC principles.

SASSMAN: Yeah. He is basically talking about things that is a problem with the proportional representation system First of all the people are not involved in the election of the president. And that is so. You vote for a party; you don't vote for an individual in both national and provincial legislatures. There is not DAN Whitman candidate for ward 10. The only place that is taking place is in local government elections where you have some of the candidates being elected on the party system and most being elected on the ward candidacy. Now Terra is challenging that. He is saying that you must vote for a candidate and not a party. So in other words he is saying that the proportional representational system must be constituency linked. Because what happens with proportional representation you vote for a party. You don't vote for a candidate.

Q: Is this constitutional?

SASSMAN: This is the new constitution.

Q: So he is talking about major constitutional change.

SASSMAN: There has got to be constitutional change because you see if you vote for the party. Then who wins the members are in parliament, the list has been submitted, and those 200 or 300 or 100 members. Then the party sets and the party says OK, now Dan Whitman lives in Pretoria, but he can be the party for Wooster. Nobody knows Dan Whitman.

Q: I may be mistaken about this but I think this is exactly the system in Spain. I think it is exactly.

SASSMAN: Yeah. Now the Germans have done the constituency link with proportional representation.

Q: We have been talking about the South African system. We have gone way away from the activities of the consulate and U.S. Information Agency which is great. We have an analysis of today's South Africa. I mean today. We are talking about something that happened two or three days ago in February, 2009. So we are looking again retrospectively at the context. We still want to talk about you. Now let's a couple of directions to go. First I would like to get more because I am sure there is much more about the things that you did when you were working at the U.S. Information Service. I also want to know about some of your activities since your retirement ten years ago.

SASSMAN: OK, things that I did with USIS in my last years of employment was primarily to use the exchange programs of USIS from the U.S. to South Africa, to use that to share the U.S. experience with appropriate South African institutions. That involved primarily working with the various parliamentary portfolio committees. Of course under the new administration in parliament the portfolio committees became the engine of parliament. The national assembly was merely an institution where they rubber stamp issues. But the real fighting took place in the portfolio committees and that is where you had consociational democracy since that. Each portfolio committee was comprised of 22 members of parliament from the different parties depending on the percentage vote that party obtained in the election. Say for instance the ANC obtained 60%, then 60% of that particular portfolio committee members would be ANC members. The DA obtained 20%, then 20% of the 22 members of that portfolio committee would be DA. Before that bill was being tabled, now in South African terms if you talk about the bill being tabled, the bill is submitted into parliament. I think in the American sense when you talk about the bill being tabled, that is put somewhere.

Q: Oh I think you are talking about the analogy in the U.S. would be a bill going to committee where the details are worked out and then it goes to the vote. Whereas the discussion is less lengthy.

SASSMAN: Yeah, now the main where the bill goes to the portfolio committee, if it is bill on justice it will go to the portfolio committee on justice, and that is where the real fighting and horse trading takes place. Because it is based on consensual consociational democracy, there has got to be consensus before it goes to the national assembly where it is rubber stamped.

Q: We are talking about the PPC, Parliamentary Portfolio Committee.

SASSMAN: Yeah, the national assembly it has got to go through the council of provinces that used to be the old senate. Now that is the provincial legislatures debating that particular bill. So I did a lot with those committees where I would bring American participants and other specialists to work with the portfolio committees and in parliament to assist in the drafting of legislation for our constitution.

Q: And of course Parliament being in Cape Town and the executive branch being in Pretoria, that is oversimplifying it but the importance of Cape Town is the parliament.

SASSMAN: It is the only place where also all the media representatives of all the media outlets internationally, you will find everybody in Cape Town at one time. In no other country in South Africa has that. Because of parliament being here we have all the MPs together in one spot and we have all the media representatives together in one spot.

Q: More than Johannesburg?

SASSMAN: Yeah because look Johannesburg never has more, the sort of all come down to parliament. So I think it would be more in Cape Town, they would be more active in Cape Town because they monitor parliament and that is where the operation is.

Q: OK they talk about Johannesburg as a media hub.

SASSMAN: That is where the business and media hub is, but I think as far as the parliamentary, the parliamentary correspondents would all be in Cape Town. But you will have parliamentary correspondents from Port Elizabeth, the eastern province _____. They are not in Johannesburg; they are down here in Cape Town. So I am saying that nationally you will have all the media representatives and international will be in Cape Town at one time.

Q: Now so your work with these parliamentary portfolio committees was very formative in resulting in the system as it is now in 2009. A lot of it was actually created in the 1990's when you were right there.

SASSMAN: Look it was that since I was the programmer with USIS Cape Town working with parliament, I would all the time programming, designing programs for. I can mention, as I mentioned to Dan when the parliamentary portfolio committee on arts, culture and science and technology was, they were grappling with legislation pertaining to intellectual property rights. They had nobody to guide them. They didn't have anybody with expertise in the field. Our agency in Washington, USIA sent us a cable offering us an import who was a specialist in intellectual property rights who did extensive work with the indigenous people in the Amazon jungle and South America. I think though my director in Cape Town requested that. And I contacted the chairperson of the parliamentary portfolio committee on the arts, culture, science, and technology whose portfolio had been to draft legislation in that field of intellectual property rights. I went to consult the chairperson and he said, "Man that is gold; bring him. Bring him for two weeks." I went to Washington and they successfully recruited this person to come, and for two weeks he worked with the parliamentary portfolio committee on arts, culture, science, and technology, and successfully drafted the legislation for intellectual property rights. So in that way it is not only these fields but also many other fields like public administration. We successfully recruited a specialist to come in and speak to the U.S. government's public administration program. Because we recruited somebody who was both a practitioner and an academic in the field he turned out to be the best contributor. They wanted him back to work with the provinces.

Q: So you saw a number of times somebody would come either through an electronic dialogue or physically come and then the demand that people, the people who needed this information implored you to bring the person back...

SASSMAN: Implored me through my office in Pretoria to bring the person back. That is important. I couldn't decide to bring him back alone. But they really appreciated it.

Q: Think of some other areas where you spent. You said IPR, public administration I am sure there are many others, public health maybe.

SASSMAN: Yeah, wait. Forensic nursing. I don't know if you remember exactly, and I was involved with that.

Remember Deval Patrick called me and said "Frank, I have got 12 law graduates, and they have done their law degree at Harvard and they want to do something for South Africa. Is there anything you can do, that you can link them up with." So I said, "Deval, as you know our legislators do not have staff at that time, and they don't have money to pay for the staff." So he said, "No, they don't want to be remunerated." They will come at their cost." So I went to the chair and the deputy chair of the parliamentary portfolio committee and both of them had met Deval because he met with their committee.

I said to them, "Look, Deval has got twelve students that he wants to bring out here to do research for legislators in South Africa." Willie Hofmeyr was the deputy chair who is now head of the asset forfeiture unit. He said bring them. I said, "You must find accommodations for them." He said, "No, problem." They brought them out the 12 graduates. These young people saw that Willie Hofmeyr and then the committee was grappling with legislation to fight organized crime. So they made the suggestion to Willie and said, "Look, used tax evasion as an excuse because that is how we got Al Capone."

Q: The students.

SASSMAN: And then they went around and there they had the asset forfeiture legislation where if you were found to be doing illegal things they confiscate your assets and they sell them to use it to fight crime. So then when that program ended Willie came to me and he said, "Frank, ask Duvall if he can get more." And they brought the second batch out. So Duvall was really, a lot of people don't know this but you concur with me that he did a lot for this country.

Q: Now let's talk about some of your trips to the U.S. either during or after your career. You had this rich network of Americans who come here and had done things thanks to your logistics and knowledge of contacts. So you benefited from this.

SASSMAN: Yeah, it is a network bar none that you have in the States. You know I started a tour of Cape Town but it was a flip side of the tourist elite. What I did everybody who came wanted to know about the group areas. They wanted to know about the different levels of housing in the western Cape. I designed a tour about an hour or hour and a half. I can move it to an hour or I can take it to an hour and a half. I can then take people. The embassy would call me and it became a must see.

Q: After retirement?

SASSMAN: No, before retirement.

Q: So you did this on the side.

SASSMAN: What I did was I showed people the different group areas and the inequalities within those group areas. Blacks have the worst, colored slightly better, Indians better and whites the best. The tracks, the other side of the tracks the colored or black area. When I finished they said, "Man now I understand the group areas," because I showed them the different levels of housing, shack dweller, the municipal rented cottage, the spec housing and then the elite, Bishop's Corner and those areas. I showed them the Indian areas, the colored areas and the black areas. That tour became so popular that I had a call from Walter Cronkite. I was still at USIS. I said, "Hello," and my director, I don't know who it was at the time was in the office with me. I said, "Yes Mr. Cronkite." He said, "Which Cronkite? The only Cronkite I know is Walter Cronkite." "This is the man," I said. And he said, "Frank, you are beautiful." He starts talking. So he said that a congressman who I had taken on the tour with a congressional delegation told him, 'If you ever get to Cape Town, get to Frank Sassman. This man spoke so highly that I must get to you. Can you do the tour?' "For you I will do it any time." I took him you know, and he said, "Frank, you are going to get a lot of Americans coming here, because I am going to start talking about this tour that shows the draconic and heinousness of this stupid policy."

Q: Cronkite said this?

SASSMAN: Yeah Cronkite said this.

Q: Was he here on business, on vacation?

SASSMAN: They were going to open up an office here. They were going to put a rep here. Then he came to negotiate with the government. This person, the congressman, told him about me, and then he said he must get to Cape Town. Then I took an assistant secretary of state, I can't remember which one. He was also recommended by somebody. So I took many. I took congressional delegations on this. They just raved about it. So many people that my one director said, "Frank you must stop doing these tours. It is taking up too much of your time." So I said, No. What was I do, when was I talked to about this? He says Talk to the ambassador. I said then what if he says who told me to speak to you? "Don't tell him I said so." I said, "No can I go make decisions myself? No, you are going to talk to the ambassador." ____ So I think you just better continue. "How can I tell the boss of the mission that no I don't want to do it?"

Q: In other words the Ambassador of course had a high interest in CODELs [Congressional Delegations] and VIP visitors, and he knew that you were showing these VIPs the things that they wanted to see.

SASSMAN: And you don't see that on the tours of the tourist organization.

Q: So the PAO looking at his time management didn't make sense. But coming from the ambassador himself the priority was clear that we needed Frank Sassman to show things.

SASSMAN: I said to him, "I have got to listen to the ambassador. He rules over you." You know the ambassador would come and he says, "Frank, what are you doing today? Are you free at lunchtime?" I say, "Why?" He said, "For lunch." I would tap my brain you see for an incident. Now I can't tell the man no. I go to lunch. Now he goes out to a ____ which is about 75 kilometers outside of town, and he sits and we chat, and I get back to the office about quarter to four. Ooo he's mad. "Look Frank. I am not hitting at you but this thing must stop. I cannot afford the Ambassador's..." I said, "Are you going to tell him?" I always put that. He said, "No, Frank, you got to." I say, "I can't tell the man that. He is the boss of the mission. You must talk to him" And that is the end of the story. But they know if you know your area and you can advise them on things then they come back to you every time.

Q: What sorts of things did the Ambassador want to know from you?

SASSMAN: Well it was like there was a time when the leader of the opposition and his main deputy, this is van Zyl Slabbert who was the head of the PFP at the time and Alex Boraine, you know. Alex Boraine who was number two on the Truth Commission. When they resigned from parliament and they started IDASA, the Institute for Democratic Alternatives in South Africa. When van Zyl spoke to say why he left parliament, he says, "The last four major pieces of legislation was passed outside parliament. So the national assembly has become a rubber stamp and politics is all extra parliamentary. I am leaving because I think I can be more effective with an organization like IDASA than I am in parliament now. If you look at IDASA it was IDASA who brought the ANC together with the South African government.

Q: It was a secret meeting.

SASSMAN: And before that the ANC was seen as murderers and terrorists. It was the image the South African government was portraying, Communist you know of the ANC leadership.

Q: So this is a tribute to IDASA that ...

SASSMAN: Yeah. And you see they are not getting the credit for their contribution to social change in this country.

Q: In fact IDASA had something to do with peace in Northern Ireland I think. Now the point was oh so this is the type of information that you received. You were the early warning system for the embassy. You knew Slabbert; you know Boraine. Some ambassadors were smart enough to come to you to get their information.

SASSMAN: Yeah in saying that the ambassador that happens they come and tap your brain. What is the rationale behind this type of thing. Then I can tell them what I told you, that these guys say IDASA is moving extra parliamentary, and they feel more effective as was proven by being extra parliamentary and playing the role they played with IDASA.

Q: Now this puts you in an awkward situation because you had ambassadors, the highest level of U.S. diplomatic presence coming to you directly, going around the DCM, around the political officer, around the public affairs officer, and people have egos.

SASSMAN: Yeah, and sometimes it would happen where they would do it to the BPAO, but sometimes like DCMs, he would just walk into my office and start talking you know.

Q: Did this cause any problem?

SASSMAN: Then I could say with my, somebody told me twice that I must say no. But I put it back in his court by saying if you tell me to tell him. I will tell you no I am not telling him. NO I won't and I can't speak to the man.

But not all of them like the political appointees. I never had that kind of contact. But it was the career officers, Princeton Lyman, Bill Edmonson, these guys and Ed Perkins.

You see so there was a closer link because I know that your career officers, they knew what role the FSN plays in the mission. They always use that. But the political officers like I will tell you about one political officer. I am not going to mention his name. I was at UCT, we had a seminar there with a congress person. We were having pressmen on this junket. Then press would always come to me and say, "Frank, who is that?" Then guys would come and consult me. This person, I can't remember his name but in any case.

Q: Just as well.

SASSMAN: He comes to a friend of mine who is an academic that he knew, David Wells, and he says to David, "Who is this guy everybody is consulting with. So David said, "You don't know him? He is your senior South African." That guy's face, David said he could have dropped dead there.

Q: The ambassador did not even know who you were.

SASSMAN: No, and he was there a couple of months. He wasn't new. He was there a couple of months, but he didn't know I was the senior USIS guy that he should be consulting.

Q: So would you say that in general or all the time, professional ambassadors consulted you; political ambassadors tended not to.

SASSMAN: Very seldom. I would say some not at all, others very seldom, but the consultation was stronger with the Princeton Lyman the Bill Edmonsons, the Ed Perkins you know, who even today extend where they sometimes want me to look at guest lists that they have to seat at dinners. I was on leave I remember, and I came back, and at that time Jimmy Krueger was the minister of justice. The guy was famous for saying, "Because death leaves me cold." He was the minister who detained Biko and in whose era he was killed. Biko is dead. Now then the ambassador at that time, I think it was Bill Edmonson, he sent over the guest list that I must look at it the way they have seated people. It was a dinner for him. There was a community activist Ronald Roberts who was detained without trial for 85 days by Jimmy Krueger the minister of justice. They had Ronald sitting opposite Krueger at the dinner table. I told the ambassador this. He called in the protocol person and says, "Why was this thing not sent to Frank? I just heard he is back from leave and just sent it over. Can you think how Ronald would have walked out the way I know him. I mean this is the man who detained him for nonsense for 85 days." That time it was 90 days for detention without trial. So before bringing him to court they can keep for 90 days. Then they must charge him. So things like that, that is why I found the career officers of the professional ambassadors, really they knew what role the FSNs were playing.

Q: South Africa is unique in so many ways. One of the unique things is that you will always have a political ambassador to France, to the UK, maybe Germany, not always. But in South Africa it can go either way. This is almost 50-50. You never can tell.

SASSMAN: No, as I said, there was consultation, but very limited consultation with the career officers.

Q: The political

SASSMAN: The most consultation was with the career officers. But the political ones some. A fair amount, most of them minimal. That is what I experienced.

Q. Now some of these people who took these positions were international visitors nominated by you Frank. Can you give us just a sampling of who some of these people are?

SASSMAN: Yeah, the prominent ones that come to mind is Phumzile, Mlambo-Ngcuka. Phumzile I met in the 80's when she was a community worker with the western province council of churches.

Q: I believe there is a community worker in the United States who is now our president. So this is a position of great importance.

SASSMAN: Great importance, yeah. So it has developed into that. She became in the 2000's she became the deputy president of South Africa to Thabo Mbeki. Another person who comes to mind is Membathisi Mdladlana. He was the head of SADTU, that stands for the South African Democratic Teacher's Union, a trade union for teachers. He was nominated when he was head of SADTU. When he came back he was appointed as minister of labor. But before that, President Mandela approached him to sort out the drafting of the constitution for the chapter of the bill of rights in our constitution. He is still today the minister of labor. Another person that comes to mind is Nozizwe Madlala-Routledge. When I met her, she was the deputy minister of defense in the South African cabinet. I nominated her and she went on a high leave. When she came back, she became the deputy minister of health and subsequent to that position which she holds now is the deputy speaker of parliament.

The other person that comes to mind is Naledi Pandor. When I first met her in the 80's she was the number two in charge of the bridging program at the University of Cape Town. Now they needed this bridging program because as you know in the apartheid years we had seven departments of education, separate departments of education, and they were not, the one was not equal to the other. Bantu education which was the worse one was the one that needed bridging programs to bring them to the level of the education at this white university.

Q: Explain this term Bantu education and the connotations.

SASSMAN: Yeah. Bantu education is the department that was controlling the education for black Africans you know. This department was the worst of the seven departments. The other thing that is significant about Bantu education it was when the government started meddling with the medium of instruction of Bantu education. In other words they wanted to change the medium from English to Afrikaans which many of the black Africans could not speak. As a result of that if you mess with somebody's language, you create big problems. It was the messing with the language and medium of instruction for Black Africans for Bantu education that brought about the rioting in schools and subsequently the change on South Africa.

Q: 1976.

SASSMAN: Sharpeville,

Q: The Sharpeville massacre. Which was part of that...

SASSMAN: That started actually the riots in schools and subsequently the change.

Q: Now could not speak Afrikaans or wanted not to speak Afrikaans?

SASSMAN: Both, a combination of both. But predominately because of the baggage attached to the Afrikaans language and the stigma they did not want to be associated with the Afrikaans language.

Q: Well these are remarkable examples. Any others?

SASSMAN: Yeah, I want to give another one. It was the first executive mayor of Cape Town. Her name was Nomaindia Mfeketo. I met her when she was just appointed as the new executive mayor of Cape Town, nominated her to go to the United States, and very fortuitously while she was on the IV program there was an international convention of mayors from all over the world. She was fortunate. She said she thought she was dreaming that she was able to attend that.

Q: The one in California?

SASSMAN: Yeah, I think it was in California.

Q: So it wasn't just American examples she got. It was examples from many countries.

SASSMAN: All over the world, yeah. She could interact with them. So those are the prominent ones I can recall.

Q: And many dozens of others. This gives a sense. Now when you say you met them, tell us a bit what was the type of connection you had? You made yesterday the distinction between friend and contact.

SASSMAN: Well you know, we as programmers we would always be accompanying our American counterparts, going out to programs in the townships, in the community. It would be a matter of meeting them out in their environment where they are operating or it can be where we invite them to programs we set up at the American center. They would then come and in that way it would be a new contact and we would meet. And by interacting with them, that is the way we get to know this person and identify their leadership qualities and then nominate them for the U.S. government ...

Q: Tell me about the difference in the quality of this contact between an FSN and an American officer with this type of contact.

SASSMAN: Well the FSN would always in eight out of ten cases know this person, might also even be a friend not just a professional contact. Whereas the American would be dependent on the FSN introducing him or her to this particular contact. We have to exercise the judgment and decision making if this is someone we might groom or get to know better so that we can nominate them for the exchange program.

Q: Not to prompt you exactly but isn't there also a factor of when you live here you know a person for many years if you are assigned here for three years there is a limit to the amount of time.

SASSMAN: Yeah, and the other big thing is that as the FSN knew the corporate memory and you provide the continuity. The other thing that I always said to people in my case if I worked for 29 years for the U.S. Information Service, and in that 29 years I worked maybe with say nine BPAOs. So in time if you find that I have the expertise of nine individuals, and when I am working with the BPAO, he has only his own expertise. So you have got to do a very light shuffle you know when you sort of play this game. Some American officers would capitalize on that saying you move, I decide on policy. You can do the work. Others would try and be above you and they could never do that.

Q: different styles. You have seen them all.

SASSMAN: So you have a composite expertise which is what some BPAOs value and others would have a problem with that.

Q: Well when you say they have a problem do they feel threatened because you knew the terrain better than they did?

SASSMAN: Yeah. Look you always see them as the number one person, and you respect them as your supervisor, but some are uncomfortable with that situation, especially when you have all the service and all the expertise. But others would capitalize on that and use that.

Q: Now yesterday, Frank,, we were talking about your strategy. Your daily survival tactics when apartheid was still the system. How you went about the country. Officially it did not have access because in your documents you were not white. So tell us about your survival tactics.

SASSMAN: Survival strategies, yeah. That was very important because maybe I should first start off by saying the most heinous and draconian apartheid legislation, piece of legislation was the group areas act. That called for every sphere of South African life must be, ethnic groups must be separated. Now if you think for instance we get a lot of American participants coming here, and we have to get hotel accommodations for them So we can start there. People of different ethnic groups couldn't stay in the same hotel. Most hotels were for whites only. There were very I would say not so good hotels that were for people who were not white.

But now I had a strategy where if I book the hotel, I just do a booking for Sassman and the American participants. But when we actually go and take up the accommodation, I have to be very subtle. If I say to the person behind the counter, "Can I stay at this hotel?" They by law have to tell me, "No, this hotel is for whites only." I will have a problem. So my strategy was I would just go up to the counter, the reception desk and say, "You have a booking for Whitman and Sassman." Now it is more difficult because I pass the onus to the person behind the desk to now tell me you are not allowed to stay here. Many of the hotel managers, their stance on this was I am a businessman. I am not a politician to interpret laws. So if I just say you have a reservation for Sassman, I would get in. And in 29 years where I would have to move around with say white American participants. I was never put out of a hotel or refused admission to stay at a hotel, where others have had this happen to them. .You know you make the mistake of going up and saying Am I allowed to stay there. That is one thing. The other thing that was also a strategy was if you go, if a person who is not a black African goes into an African township, under the apartheid legislation, you needed a permit.

Q: Does this imply that white South Africans had a touch of indifference to the group areas act? What is your sense. Interpret if you can what was the prevailing sense. Did Whites just look the other way and hope to ignore the whole situation or did they believe in the law, or did they actually find the law an annoyance.

SASSMAN: I think the law gave them privileges that they wouldn't normally have, so they benefited from this because when the change came we found it strange that there was no white that supported apartheid.

Q: Ha, ha, ha. They all disappeared.

SASSMAN: They would say Oh I never. But they took advantage. If you take something like job reservation. Under apartheid we also had job reservation. Take for example a situation with the public transport. 60% of the bus drivers had to be white. Only 40% can be people of color. So say for instance now and the situation was always the 40% would be fully filled for colored, African or Indian drivers, but the 60% was never filled. So you had a situation that maybe 20% of the 60% there were vacancies. But you could not employ a black African or colored or Indian to drive in a vacancy that is reserved for the white.

Q: There was this discrepancy I think because there were fewer whites. What is it 20% or 15%?

SASSMAN: Yeah in the Western Cape I would say about 20-30% was white.

Q: So the potential labor pool of the non whites was much greater, but the greater share of positions was reserved for the minority whites.

SASSMAN: Yeah definitely. And it wasn't easy you know. Then you had another thing that a lot of people who were not classified as white would try and jump the color the color line to get themselves reclassified for economic reasons, to get a jump. Like in the printing trade most of the jobs were reserved for whites. But a lot of fair skinned coloreds would go and move away from their relatives and live in a poor white area where it is easier for them to be reclassified. We call it jumping the color line. They would only visit their relatives late at night so that people who know them do not know their relatives are colored, African or Indian. So these were the kinds of things that were going, but I just felt that my strategy was successful within the situation because I was never, it was never that I could not do my job because of my color. I had to use survival strategies to keep going.

You see now there under the influx control laws, Group Areas Act and all that, anybody who is not white who wanted to, no. Anybody who was not black African and wanted to go into a black township needed a permit. Now this went against the principles of many people, especially American visitors. Now why do I need a permit, and if I apply for a permit it means I accept the principle of apartheid. So we have to be very subtle and I would like to tell you about a particular incident. Myself and one of my deputy directors, as we call them ABPAO, and a black African lawyer from the eastern cape. We were shown, there was a funeral, and there was a massacre of the mourners where the police just opened up and shot them. Boy Majodina, I don't think the name anybody who was a black African advocate said he wanted to go and show us. He wanted to show us where this massacre took place. So obviously we had to apply. The embassy didn't have applied for permits so 50 of us went. At that time the security police whenever we as embassy officials visited the area, I don't know how they know but there would always be a little Volkswagen following us to make sure, and look after us to make sure we do the right things. And as we enter the township the Volkswagen came and they stopped us. The policeman came out and said, "You are now in a black African township which is Kwanobuhle." So this was a black African township and we needed a permit to be there. He then said to us, "Can you show me your permit?" So the deputy BPAO said, "We do not apply for permits so we do not have a permit." So then the policeman said, "Well we have to detain you and subsequently arrest you because you re in a Black African township without a permit."

Q: No diplomatic immunity.

SASSMAN: Wait, he didn't know at that time we were diplomats. So then he spoke Russell, the ABPAO, then he says, "You are not a South African." I said, "No." so Russell said, "We are from the embassy." Then in knew that my strategy for that kind of a situation was I do not speak Afrikaans, which is one of the official languages. If I speak Afrikaans then they will know I am a South African and not an American. So that was the strategy I used. Also I would speak English, I would never speak in a situation like that. So if he doesn't hear my accent, he will assume that working for the embassy I would be an American and that would give me some kind of immunity. So Russell raised the question about diplomatic immunity. He said, "No." Now he has got a problem, the policeman. He goes and he gets on the phone. Now he is speaking in Afrikaans to the brigadier to say, "Brigadier, we have three American diplomats here also the Black African advocate," also diplomatic status now. He doesn't need a permit because he is a black African and he doesn't need a permit to be in that area. So then I understood what he said, and I could then interpret and tell my American officer.

Q: What did he say word for word?

SASSMAN: He said in Afrikaans, Brigadier... so what he said was in English, "Brigadier, there is big shit here." In other words he has now detained three diplomats and he doesn't know what to do now. So then the Brigadier then told me, and this is what he related to us, that the brigadier says look, and Russell the American officer then told him, "Look, why must we get permits in South Africa. Your diplomats in the United States do not have to apply for permits. You can go anywhere you want to." He says, "Well that is America, this is South Africa." Russell said, "We do not apply for permits, so you will have to do what you deem appropriate."

Q: Approximately what year?

SASSMAN: This was 80's. So then Russell said, So we stood there now. So the Brigadier said, "Well you can take these people around without a permit and let them see whatever they want to see, and then make sure they get out of the black township." So Russell said, "Well we have already seen what we wanted to see, so can we go now?" So he says, "Yeah you can go." We got into our car, and that Volkswagen followed us from Kwanobuhle right to Port Elizabeth airport to make sure we got on the plane to go back to Cape Town. So that distance that they followed us was plus minus 80 kilometers. Say about 40 miles. I also took congressional delegations with the consul general to a black African squatter camp where we require a permit. Now one particular incident with was also in the early 80s, as we went into the squatter camp, the security police stopped us and said where is our permit. So the consul general explained to him, "We cannot apply for permits, so we do not have a permit but we wanted to show the congressmen what is happening here. So he said, 'Well you will have to get a permit.'" So the consul general said, "Well I am not prepared to apply for a permit."

Q: It was the policy of the U.S. embassy and the U.S. government.

SASSMAN: Yeah, the U.S. government did not apply for permits. If you found under South African law if you are in a squatter camp or shanty town or any township for Black Africans and you do not have a permit, you can be prosecuted. They have already arrested and they acquitted him again a white member of the South African parliament for being in an area without a permit.

Q: Prosecuted for what type of penalty?

SASSMAN: Well it is a fine and just a warning. But the law says you can be arrested. They also arrested the leader of the opposition for being in possession of a banned book and he was fined a certain amount of rand. So then when the consul general insisted that he is going to go in, this policeman became aggressive and says, "Look, if you bring these congressmen into this camp, I have the right to baton and charge you." You know you call it the baton, where they have the baton the police person carries, and would beat us up you know. So I said to the consul general, "No, we make as if we are leaving. I will take you to the other side. There is a road or whatever and there is a hill. That area is not a black area. It is a colored area. So we do not need a permit. And if we go to the top of the hill we have an overview of what is happening there." Because you see what they were doing. At the moment, they were demolishing the temporary structures that the squatters were putting up there. It was going to rain that evening. That is what we wanted to see. So then before they realized it we were on the hill on the other side. Then the policeman came, it was security police, and he came to the consul general and I was standing next to the consul general. He said, "Look, you have to leave." So I said to him, in Afrikaans to make him know that I am a South African because the consul general is now there. So I said to him, "No, we do not need a permit here. Is this a black African area?" He said, "No it is a colored area." "Then we don't need a permit." He looked at me and he said, "You are too clever. You must watch yourself." So we could see and the congressmen walked around there. So that was the kind of thing that wasn't just like in any other society where you just do the job. There was a threat to your life. I remember there was also a time when in parliament they discussed the activities of the USIS officers in the country. They accused the USIS officers of being involved in subversive activities. You know it came out in the Eastern Cape area one of the constituencies in the eastern cape. He brought this to the attention of parliament. That time the whole question of U.S. foreign investment versus disinvestment or divestment was very prominent. We had a video tape on the program that was on the U.S. in the early 80's The advocates, where they would take the topic and they would then debate the topic. This was disinvestment of American companies in South Africa. I remember Chester Crocker was still an academic at the time. He was not assistant secretary for African affairs. He wasn't in that position yet. Alex Boraine who became the number two to Desmond Tutu for the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, they were and Jennifer Davis, a South African economist who was living in the United States, and Dennis Brutus who was a South African professor who was living in exile in the U.S. They then debated and we showed this tape in East London. We showed the tape in Graves Town and We showed it in Port Elizabeth. The security police followed us from East London down to Port Elizabeth which was plus minus 600 kilometers, say about 300 miles. Then they reported to parliament that the American embassy was there showing subversive materials. So this was the kind of thing you had to counter all the time. It wasn't just like in a normal society where you can just do these things.

Q: So you were showing this video in various places and the police physically followed you?

SASSMAN: Yeah, and they were in the audience also. They would come in because we wouldn't know it was police.

Q: And they had friends in the parliament and they went straight to them.

SASSMAN: Well they reported to their member of parliament because they raised this in parliament in other words to do something to the American embassy.

Q: Did parliament ever do anything.

SASSMAN: No, they never did anything.

Q: But they debated the question.

SASSMAN: I got the Hansard, you know Americans are familiar with Hansard. This is the publication that publishes verbatim what happens in parliament. Both he and my director the BPAO at the time and myself, our names were mentioned in Hansard.

Q: Wow, which is OK for Bob Heath because he can leave the country, but you live here. You had to live with this.

SASSMAN: I can't speak for other FSNs, but for me in particular because I was very active in these things with my American counterparts. They would try and intimidate me. I will give you some examples. There was one incident where I had a call from this person, and he claimed he was a security officer with the South African navy, the Simonson dockyard is the headquarters of the South African navy. Obviously he said he is a secure.

I said, "Are you with the Security Police to clear that." He said, "No I am not with the Security Police. I am with security at the navy." I said, "Why are you calling me?" "You are working for the American embassy." I said, "Yes." He says, "Your brother is working for the South African navy." I said, "Yes." He said, "Now we are concerned that when you and your brother meet that he might be telling you secrets about the South African Navy." I said, "No, the last thing we speak about is the work. We talk about family issues and all kinds of things." So he said "We want to come and visit you and find out exactly what you are doing." I said, "No, if you want to find out what I am doing, you have got to come to my work place." I do not make policy. I am not involved in embassy policy, so if you are coming, and I have no problem. I have got nothing to hide. Then I would like my ambassador to be present. But I don't want you at my home and I don't want to meet with you anywhere else."

He said, "Ok I will come back to you," and he never came back to me. So it was obvious that it was the security police trying to intimidate me. It was another incident where they saw they couldn't get at me because the embassy was always there for me, and the ambassador told me that anything job related and I have problems with it the embassy would support me. So then they tried getting at me through my youngest son. They arrested him at a demonstration when somebody that we knew in the community was going to be imprisoned for ten years, and he was going to jail that day, and they had a church service. He stood there with a poster with the words of "We shall overcome." The hymn that was sung in the American South.

Somebody called me to say that my son has been arrested. I called my lawyer who subsequently in the new democracy became minister of justice, Dullah Omar. I said, "Look my son has just been arrested, and please you have got to help me." He said, "OK, go out there and find the details of who is interrogating him and who arrested him and then get back to me." I went to the Weinberg Court and I spoke to the person in charge. He said, "No, look. Your son isn't actually being arrested. They took him because he had this offensive poster. The security police is busy interrogating him. You can check with me in an hour's time. If they feel that he wasn't involved in anything subversive, they will release him." I said, "Fine."

I called Dullah again and gave him the details. After an hour and then people they network and they call around if somebody has been arrested, "Say Frank, did you hear your son has been arrested?" A friend of mine who is a supreme court judge, we have known each other for years, he called me and said, "Listen if there is anything I can do give me a call, but you must get your son out of there from the clutches of those guys." So then I went back to the court after the hour and saw this person and he said to me, "What do you associate with this/ Is this a subversive song or what?" I said, "Well as far as I know it was a hymn that was sung in the South in America. I don't see anything wrong." He said, "You are too smart." So I then said to him, "Now look you said when you finish interrogating my son that you will release him." He said, "No, I changed my mind. Because a judge called here and Dullah Omar who is a top political lawyer called here asking about your son." I think you must be involved." I said, "But if you mean involved I am doing a job like you are doing a job. I work for the American embassy, and if you guys are not happy with that, your fight is with the chief of mission my ambassador. It is not with me. I just carry out instructions like you carry out."

He said, No I don't want to talk to you.

I then called Dullah again and Dullah said, "Look, we must get him out of there so go to a magistrate and get him to arrange bail." So then the banks are closed, and I find I didn't have 300 rand bail. So I had to find the money. Then another guy said he has got some money in his safe. We went and I said, "I will get the money back to you." So then we got him out. My son appeared, they said the law under which they are arresting him which he violated is that you cannot demonstrate within 500 meters of a court of law against a case. You cannot demonstrate within 500 meters of a court of law. So he appeared the first time. They said, "No the detective handling the case is still gathering evidence." Second time again.

Third time when we appeared, I said to the lawyer that Dullah assigned to me, this lawyer is today the chief legal advisor to the South African Government. I said to him, "Look can we look at this act, this law what is it saying. So we looked at the law and what the law actually said was that you cannot demonstrate within 500 meters of a court of law against a case that is currently being tried. This guy was sentenced two years ago so he was going to prison now, so it has got nothing to do. So let's go see the magistrate. This law is not applicable. So we sent to the magistrate.

The magistrate looked at the law and said no. So why is that case, I said, "No that case was tried two years ago. This man was going to prison and there was a church service and he was just supporting." So the magistrate called the detective and he reprimanded him in front of my lawyer and myself saying, "Look you are wasting the court's time. This law is not applicable in that particular case," And they acquitted my son. I went a long way just to show you just how meticulous and how they trump up charges you know.

Q: Tell me about the attitude towards the law. It is called Dutch Roman. Law. It is a funny paradox because the law was an instrument of oppression and yet there was a tremendous respect I think for the text of the law.

SASSMAN: The laws under apartheid was intentionally very vaguely written. It was not very specific. Which then allowed subjectivity to come into it, your personal interpretation. In other words if the two of us looked at a particular law, then your interpretation might differ because of the vagueness of the law and because of the subjectivity it would depend on the political ideology of that person who is interpreting. This was always the case. But if they see that like in my particular case now on a technicality we said to them this doesn't apply then they have no alternative but to back away.

Q: Even though they have all the trump cards in their hands and all you had was the text of the law. They had the power, and yet the argument using the text. You say the texts were written intentionally vague, but in this case it was clear.

SASSMAN: It was clear.

Q: But although they could have done anything they wanted. Apparently they retreated not from you but from the way that the law was written.

SASSMAN: They did, but the other thing. That is why a lot of black lawyers or lawyers who were not white strongly argued this point saying that if you take rape. Let's take rape. Now it is the same crime. The circumstances can be exactly the same. But in the one case if it is a white perpetrator raping a black woman, he would maybe get a fine or he would be acquitted, or he would be sentenced to one or two months. You get the same situation with a black man rapes a white woman, at that time we had the death penalty. He could be sentenced to death. He could get imprisonment of five or ten years. So those would be the two. For the same crime the same circumstances, but the sentencing, you see the subjectivity there, the sentence would be totally different.

Q: So the sentencing was not codified and this was left up to the discretion of the judge.

SASSMAN: The judge or the magistrate. So as I say it is the same circumstances, same crime but look at the severity of the sentence on the one hand or on the other hand.

Q: The subjectivity of the judge determining our view.

SASSMAN: Yeah, then another thing that was part of my job, and sometimes the political section, my director would ask us. We have a judge, we have a lawyer, take them out to the pass law courts. Now this was if anybody, people would sit there for about two or three minutes and then they say no I want to go. What happens there, I must first explain to you the influx control law. In the case of a person who is not a black African you have an identity document. The police would never ask you to produce that document in the street. You would produce that to prove that you are Dan Whitman. You would show the bank, the post office over here. But the pass, or the don't pass as they call it. Every person who was black African had to carry a pass. That pass under the influx control laws, Africans were kept out of the urban areas unless you were born in an urban area. Now there is flexibility within that. But Africans were not allowed to be in the urban area without their pass being endorsed accordingly. So under the influx control laws where it was used to keep the Africans out of the urban area. They had to be in the rural area. Under that law, a person will be arrested if you are found in Central Cape Town and your pass is not endorsed for you to be in Cape Town.

Q: Which you are if you're a domestic worker. Is that correct? How did they deal with the domestic worker?

SASSMAN: No you could be under building trade, you could work on the building trade. But if say I am a white person and I have a domestic person working for me. I have to go to the authorities and have her pass endorsed to say that she is allowed to work for Frank Sassman in this particular area, and it is stamped by the Bantu administration. Bantu at that time was the classification they used with the person who was black African. So then they would then arrest that person and those people would appear in the pass law courts out on the townships. Like there was one in Lungar, there was one in Guguletu, and there was one in Nyanga. So then that person would appear. That is where I used to take to show the American visitor you know whether it is an American government official, or whether it is an academic coming as an import. The congressional delegations always wanted to see how the influx control laws worked. So then I would take them there and we would sit there and they would have a retired magistrate there. Normally an Afrikaner but an English Afrikaner. He would then, and it would be one or two minute court cases. The guy would come in and get into the dock. The magistrate will say to him, "I understand you were found in Cape Town or you were found in Weinberg and you were there and when asked to produce your pass, your pass was not endorsed for you to be in that area. So you are guilty under the influx control laws so that is 200 rand or 40 days in prison." So the man obviously does not want to go to prison so he pays it. It was a money making thing.

Then one day I went and I had the Ambassador with me. I didn't like going there because to me it was inhumane. The people I took always said to me, "Frank, I know you had to bring me here to see this. But I know you don't like bringing me." I said, "No, you are right, but I mean it is my job. I want you not to leave here, you must know this part of life in South Africa." So this particular day the Black Sash, I don't know if you are familiar with the black sash. These started as the women of members the wives of members of parliament. They got together and formed this organization. They helped the disadvantaged people like if they had to appear in court they would get representation. They wore a black sash. They were the wives of members of parliament from different opposition parties. They would always be there to help the disadvantaged communities. So Moyla Henderson, she was a friend of mine, she was president of the black sash. So she said something very interesting on this occasion when I took some congressmen and the ambassador. She said in front of him. She said, "You know Mr. Ambassador, we are very happy when Frank comes here with foreign visitors."

So the ambassador said to her, "Why are you happy, because Frank as he tells it doesn't like coming here."

She said, "No, magistrate knows Frank and they know that he is bringing foreigners. So the morning Frank is there, everybody is acquitted." So she said, "Mr. Ambassador, we wish you could assign Frank just to be here all the time." Then my attitude changed. My attitude changed toward this and I said, "Look whenever I go, I go with a smile now, because I feel I am helping my fellow black South Africans to at least not be prosecuted with this silly law."

Q: So the magistrate didn't care about you. He cared about the international visitors you brought.

SASSMAN: Yeah, he knew I was associated with the embassy, and so he knew that look he has got foreigners here with him and we don't want them to see how stupid the system is I suppose, so then they would acquit the guys. But once I am gone, then it is the same thing, 200 rand or whatever. But you know what they did then? The police would take that guy who paid the 200 rand, they would take him and put him on the next train to the homelands. That guy, because he knows there is no work in the homelands, the next station he gets off and comes back. But he takes that chance. So this was just things that we had to learn how to use our status with the embassy and whatever to survive and do our job. Then with marches, we had marches. I marched; it was a march to free Mandela. It was a symbolic march. There was no way we could get him out. He was at that time at Victor Frestair. There was no way we could get him out of prison but again just to demonstrate. So we went...

Q: Was this within the work or outside of the work?

SASSMAN: No this was in my personal capacity because I couldn't not be part of my community even though I worked for the embassy. I know they didn't look lightly at this. So in any case I went. We came to the venue where the march was banned. In other words the police said this was an illegal march but the ____ people were there. So they changed the venue from Cliff Fontaine Road to Hewitt. We went there. When we came there, there were thousands of people. The said, "Look the march has been banned, but we will have this illegal march. And as we walk we will get to the bridge and when we get there we will just disperse and then make our demand to the police who are obviously following us." So we marched and as we marched more people came in. by the time we came to the bridge, the railway bridge there were about 10,000 people in this march. There was the police cordoning off. We can't go any further now. Then the Brigadier came with his loud hailer and said, "Look, this is an illegal march, and we give you two minutes to disperse." Now can you imagine, two minutes to disperse 10,000 people? Then the religious leaders, Tutu and other guys who always led the marches said, "Look, we are just going to kneel and pray, and then we will disperse."

Q: Was Tutu there that day?

SASSMAN: Yeah. He was at that particular, it was a big march. It was to free Mandela, which was just symbolic. It was a lot of ministers from the different congregations. As we are praying we could just feel the whips of the police across the back. They beat us up. I was...

Q: They beat 10,000 people?

SASSMAN: Well they couldn't beat everybody but they came from the front. They beat me; they got Monica Joyi. There was a baton. I found her lying there in the gutter bleeding. So of course I couldn't find my one son who was also in the march. I found him in the college which they used almost like a hospital because then they used buckshot to also shoot people. They used rubber bullets. Now the rubber bullet, you know the torch battery, are you familiar with it.

Q: Yes.

SASSMAN: It is the size of the big torch battery, not the small but the big.

Q: That is big. The AA battery.

SASSMAN: Now they use that and it is like a hard rubber like a plastic. They shoot that out of a gun. It will take off people's little finger. Takes out your eye, and that is what they used to disperse us. I actually brought it. I have a rubber bullet that I own./ But in any case so they then, OK but I must tell you this to show what happens in a normal society with marchers. I was in San Diego I told you when I studied at the University of California in San Diego. So then there was a street there. The citizens wanted that street's name changed to Martin Luther King Drive, and they were now marching, you know. Just to voice the opinion or make a point about it. So then the guy was at the university with me said, "Frank, are you going with?" So first I said to him, "Will it be safe?" He said, "Why are you asking that, Will it be safe?" I realized I am not in South Africa now, I am in America. So I explained to him. He said, "No, the police are here protecting us. The police are not beating us up as in your country as you explained to me." Then I was honored to be in this march and see the other side of marches in a democracy. When ours was not a democracy and it was a threat to your life if you were to go into. If that rubber bullet hit you at the wrong place, you can be killed. So that was an experience to me. I thought I was in South Africa I said to the guy, will it be safe for me to go in the march. This was I am glad to say it is not there any more. If we have marches now it will be like your marches in the U.S. The police is there to protect you, not to beat you up.

Q: From the worst to the best, how many years, from the day of this march when you were beaten. When would this have been in the 80's?

SASSMAN: The mid 80's yeah. Early 80's.

Q: So 20 years. Complete opposite. That is an important historical guiding post. Now we also were talking yesterday on another subject. The role of the FSN in a U.S. consulate or embassy. You used the example of this great coup where you advised Ambassador Swing that Mandela would be free in 48 hours. Swing very artfully converted this into a phone call from President Bush Senior. You were even able to get the phone number of Dullah Omar where Mandela was. Everybody got credit for this but you did not. I think the expression you used yesterday was I will put you on a pedestal but please make sure you drag me with you. Can you talk about the role of the FSN.

SASSMAN: Let me start by telling you the role of the FSN. When I was employed I saw that I must advise the Americans that I work with about the status quo or the social political situation in the country because I know my country They are only here for three years and then they leave. So they can never know my country like I know. So one of the things was that I had to share my expertise with my American colleagues and advise them. I think sometimes they would openly ask the question or sometimes I would just take it on myself to advise them. Also I would never hesitate to say Look, because of what is happening because of strikes or whatever, I say we cannot go into the township because I cannot guarantee your safety or even my own safety and we will put ourselves at risk going in. So that was one role. The other role was that we had to at all times in from the, I worked through my office, my BPAO who would then get the message to the ambassador unless he tells me to go direct. So I would say to them for instance when I heard about the Mandela incident, that he is going to be released. It is my duty to go to the Ambassador or my BPAO and say, "Look, I heard that in two says time Mandela is going to be released. I just want to share this with you and I think it is important that you relay this to Washington through whatever channels." So he said to me, "Frank, I think we go over to the Ambassador. So we went over to the ambassador and he told me to tell him. I told the ambassador and the ambassador says, "Look, this is a very significant event. What I would like you to do, Frank, if you can is go back and seeing you know the organizers, the upper echelons of the ANC, who is organizing this whole thing. I want you to go there and confirm this first of all. And secondly find out from them if it is possible if they can take Mandela to a venue where they can give us a telephone number and we can then arrange for the embassy side that President Bush Senior calls Mandela within hours of his release and be the first international statesperson to congratulate Mandela on attaining his freedom."

So I said to the Ambassador "I have to go back to UWC." I went back to the University of the Western Cape, UWC as we refer to it, and spent a lot of time there trying to get to the people. They said, "Well I must come back The person that I should speak to is Amorsa who is one of the senior ANC officials. He will be there at about past 11:00 in the evening. I went back there, but you know how it is with the activist. Time they can say it would be an hour...

Q: They are elastic.

SASSMAN: What do they say, African people's time, colored people's time. They have all kinds of time. IN any case so then I finally got Amorsa and I spoke to him. Dullah Omar was with him and I spoke to him. They said, "Look, they would like to do this. They are going to put this to the hierarchy of the ANC." Then they will get back. I said, "Look, at this point this is the ambassador's number. I would like to step out of this. You can go direct to the ambassador." He said, "Yeah they will do that." The ambassador then spoke direct to them and it happened. Mandela mentioned this in his book "The Long Walk to Freedom." We said that the particular paragraph referring to that he did not mention names except the name of President Bush Senior. And what he said there was, "this phone call meant a lot to him. The top international statesman calling him. He said that it moved him. He said, "Secondly what he liked was that when he spoke to President Bush Senior, President Bush told him that having been incarcerated for 27 years, he has to be updated on several things.." Now President Bush, in the book Mandela mentioned this, that President Bush at that time had 27 people that he kept on top of things pertaining to international incidents. He said to Mandela, he would add his name to that list. "That," Mandela said, "was invaluable to him especially having been incarcerated for 27 years and having been out of things." Then the other thing he mentioned in that paragraph. He said what he admired about President George Bush as got to know him...

Q: OK, Mandela's book has comments about President Bush.

SASSMAN: Yeah, and he said the other comment he made about President Bush he said as he spoke to him, I don't know what was the duration of the phone call, but during the duration he summed President Bush up as a person you could disagree with, but will disagree with him in such a way and he will respect you in such a way that if you leave him, you still want to shake his hand and respect him. But he valued the opportunity for that call. Then I thought to myself, now look, this was, when the call happened, and I heard that the call happened I thought when am I going to hear from my employers about being rewarded for what I did here. It was a significant thing. I had nothing. My BPAO I went to him this is now, and he didn't hear anything. Now I am sure that he must have got some kind of reward. Then I started bugging management saying Look I feel I should be given a merit award for this. It took about three years. That BPAO was gone. Others who knew me and were assigned previously, and came back again. I spoke to them, and then I think in , it was in the early 90's I did get the award. And the award I was given in addition to other things I achieved, I was given the FSN of the year for the top foreign service national working for all the embassies on the continent of Africa.

Q: There are a couple of questions here. One is the relative position of let's say the social status of the FSN within the continent. The other question is you are representing a foreign country within your country. Surely there must be issues. Because of a possible, in fact your loyalties have to be to two countries instead of one. That is really the more profound question. What comments do you have about this? I won't say double loyalty but it is a different degree of loyalty than a diplomat has.

SASSMAN: Yeah, that is why you have to virtually cut yourself in half because you have a job and you know this job requires that you do not tarnish the name of your employer. But I am first a South African citizen, and I have got to get involved with political issues within my country. But I always had to do it exactly but I didn't sort of you cannot say that I am not wearing an American hat at the moment. I am just wearing a South African hat.

Q: You can't change back and forth.

SASSMAN: Exactly. The other thing is the thing was working for the top western power and being employed by the U.S. government as opposed to the South African government. Your status is enhanced in your community. Everybody looks up to you that you are working for the American embassy and you are doing things for the American embassy. Then there are people who are going to say No, why are you working for the Americans and not. Now I could always counter that by saying if I had to go and work for the South African diplomatic corps I would have to go abroad and defend apartheid. Is that right? And then I would get out of it you know.

Q: So the question was not why are you working for the Americans but why them rather than your own government. It was sort of a dual question.

SASSMAN: So it was the worst time for me to be working for the American embassy was under the constructive engagement years. That was the most difficult time because the Americans, and I didn't challenge it at first. I thought they tried to bring about embargoes. They tried to reprimand them and shape them. That is what you are doing, it is wrong. So they thought why not try and be their friend. You know constructive engagement, and be supportive and say look we want to help you to change the image of whatever and all that. It didn't work. For me they kept on a bit too long. It was very difficult, and you know like what is it, annuals and other periodicals had very strong criticisms of constructive engagement, you know Sandy Ungar, Peter Yale these guys, South African and Americans would combine politicians and they would write strong articles against constructive engagement. Even the opposition members of parliament boycotted our functions. The American day of independence, fourth of July they wouldn't come, and they would send the invite back and say because the reason for not coming is Constructive Engagement.

Q: Now this is intriguing. Yesterday you said you had mixed feelings I think personally. Yesterday you were saying this was a valuable policy. This was a good try to try to fix the situation without violence. Now you are saying, I think you just said it was a legitimate idea but they carried it on too long.

SASSMAN: Too long. That was more the thing because it was like even when I would get to friends of mine at that rally or so, some would say jokingly, others would be serious and say, "Here is the American spy coming." They never said it other times, but now with constructive engagement. So it was a necessary and I understood why the Americans did it They tried iron fist or the strong arm approach, and now they were saying show these guys we want to be their friend and help them bring about the changed. Now a lot of people misinterpreted this and said no they are siding too close to these guys. Like with a one particular fourth of July function you know, the American Day of Independence, they invited Pete Kournoff who was South African ambassador to the United States. He was also a member of parliament and a member of the cabinet. They invited him to be the keynote speaker at the Fourth of July. The opposition MPs were saying are you rewarding Pete Kournoff by making him honorary speaker at your fourth of July which is a very significant American event, making him the keynote speaker when he was the one who gave the orders to break down the shacks of squatters in a squatter camp when it was in the heart of winter and these people were exposed to the elements. That kind of thing you know. They would then not come to the function. They would boycott it. We had some people, especially the people from AZAPO, the Azanian People's Organization, which was to the left of the ANC, also the PNC, the Pan African Congress who was also to the left, they at times were declining grants to go to America. They did not attend our functions, you know, round table discussions etc. But this was exacerbated during constructive engagement. People who were still our friends you know and attended also started saying no, this is the end now.

Q: A couple of questions. First have you ever met Chet Crocker. He has been here a number of times.

SASSMAN: Yeah, I met him. Not sort of one on one you know.

Q: I want to get your impression of Chet Crocker first of all, and your judgment in retrospect now of the policy of Constructive Engagement.

SASSMAN: Yeah, well Chet Crocker first. I confess I found him at the time I met him, he had just come out of academia and was now assistant secretary of state for African affairs. I found him to be a bit on the conservative side. And a person who might have even been part of the constructive engagement policy and also supportive.

Q: I believe he created it.

SASSMAN: Yeah, that is why. I didn't know that, but I saw that he was very supportive of it. Even at that particular meeting, who was it. I think it was Alex Boraine or somebody who actually had an argument with him. Then the other guy was also at that meeting when I met with Crocker was Peter Veil. Peter was political scientist who was the head of the Institute for Southern African Affairs, he was the one who did that in Foreign affairs, he and Sandy Ungar did that very critical article on constructive engagement. So I wasn't impressed with Chet Crocker.

Q: Personally did you find the police repugnant at that time?

SASSMAN: I found the department then, but I understood why they were going that route. You see, like anybody you don't leave any stone unturned. You try everything because the Americans and the other Western nations, they were sincere. They wanted to help, and destroy the system of apartheid. Now as a politician, I think you also feel I could have tried that and it might also have succeeded. So they tried that. Even the ambassador we had at the time was a political appointee, very supportive of constructive engagement. I just said to myself there was no way I was going to defend constructive engagement publicly, you know. But I know that in the same way as many of my American colleagues felt the same way you know. Some readily accepted; others had a job to do, and they did it under protest, but not visual protest.

Q: Were you able to reconcile your personal antipathy with this policy with the position which at that time Constructive Engagement was the policy?. And yet you were, you found some peace. You found reconciliation in yourself being pulled in both directions. You said earlier you had to cut yourself in half.

SASSMAN: Yeah, definitely. As I say the big thing to me was I understood, and that was in line with my philosophy. Try everything. Don't leave any stone unturned. The only thing I had against it, they tried too long. They could see it was wrecking the mission in South Africa. The Americans were losing friends. Let's put it that way.

Q: Even within the U.S. Now the last question that appears on my agenda let's say, and this may be unexpected. This is 2009. We are supposedly in a war against terror. A lot of our efforts in the diplomatic world have to do with Islam. There is a large Muslim community in the Cape. What is your sense of the challenges we have in the Cape in dealing with this community.

SASSMAN: Look, I find that and as I read papers and look at the global picture, and I find the Muslim community in Cape Town would be much more assertive or extreme than in other parts of the world. Now I wouldn't see that as atypical. That is typical because in South Africa you find that regionally things differ. People view the Western Cape as more critical. Just to give you an example of there was the Union of Black Journalists, right? It was a banned organization. A lot of Muslim journalists were on that. So we would get two journalists from America coming, one black and one white to come and share the U.S. model of journalism with South Africans. The first people we would go to because they had been isolated. They didn't get all the exposure that the white journalists got, we would start with the Union of Black Journalists. Then I would get my colleague from Pretoria or from Durban saying, "hey we have set up a good program with the two journalists or the Union of Black Journalists in Johannesburg or Durban. We liaise and we network on this." But then I know my job is not going to be that easy but I go. I must approach them I come there and they always say we will get back to you. I know they are going to call Chris Nine and they come back and say no, we don't want anything to do with American journalists. And they don't cite any reason. I once asked them, and they said, "No, that is not important. It is an imperialist country and we can't." I would always have that and the PAO would say But Frank, it is the same organization, Durban, Joburgers having a good program. As a matter of fact it is on now. " I said, "Well this is South Africa and there are regional differences.. The Western Cape is always to the left of everybody else." So I felt that sometimes there would be marches on the embassy here in Cape Town. You know there is this mosque in the immediate vicinity. So there would be this march down, and sometimes it would become a bit violent, you know. So I always say that and once PAGAD started here.

Q: Explain PAGAD.

SASSMAN: People Against Drugs and whatever.

Q: Yeah explain to the person who has never heard of PAGAD.

SASSMAN: Yeah, PAGAD is an acronym for People Against Gangsters and Drugs. OK, there we are. People Against Gangsterism and Drugs. It is an organization that was started in the Western Cape. At the time it was started, everybody has had it with organized crime which is two of the major problems. You know their houses were being burgled, your children were introduced to drug addiction and so on. So when PAGAD came to the scene, the membership in PAGAD transcended political affiliations, religious affiliations and political ideologies. Because the common or uniting factor was the fight against gangsterism and drugs. I used to go to their marches. It wasn't just Muslims. And it was big marches. We were thinking of thousands of people. Two of my friends both Muslim, the one was a magistrate and the other was a senior worker, official Indian in parliament and now we are marching you know. We were marching towards the airport, but it was some protest march against drugs and gangsters. Now this was and PAGAD was operative for a couple of months. The next thing we know now the guys have this long religious garb that they wear. The next thing, guys on this side of the three of us now are walking. Guys on that side pull out shotguns and just start firing in the air. I said, "No." then I started having second guesses about PAGAD you know. Then the other thing both of my friends, the Muslim said, "This is not what I came for. I came here for the fight against drugs and against gangsterism." And then we had a long chat about it after the march, and they concurred with me. We are not saying it is Islam that is bad. It is the people who were participating and had hidden agendas. Then subsequently it came out that there was a hidden agenda. It was to certain extend more a battle for turf with the drug trades and whatever you know. Then the number of people participating. There was no member ship you know. We just went to the Mosque. A number of people participating in these marches, doing them. That if at that time you look at 10,000, look at 5,000 people some of the marches I was in. Today if PAGAD, you hardly hear of PAGAD today. But today if they have a march if they are going to muster under 200 people it is a sell out.

Q: This demonstration would have been in the late 90's?

SASSMAN: No, PAGAD came to the scene I think in the late 80's early 90's. But now the organization is still there, but they don't have the clout that they had when they came out first. As I say, then it was not only Muslims, it was sort of inter-denominational you know. People of all denominations.

Q: You said the opinions of people generally in the cape are more extreme or more passionate than in the rest of the country. If the numbers have dwindled, does that mean that the intensity of the activity and the passions have also dwindled? I am trying to see between the two pictures, one of a more extreme community and the other one a loss of numbers. What is the challenge?

SASSMAN: It dwindled more not so much with the extremities and people who would be more emotional about that. It is more..

Q: Are you saying PAGAD is less of a concern to us now than it was some years ago?

SASSMAN: Yeah, definitely.

Q: You say not to be obsessive about this but you say the Muslim community in the Cape, let me say it in an open ended way. What should I think of their attitude toward the U.S. ?

SASSMAN: Look, the attitude varies you know. Not everybody who has the strong feelings of PAGAD towards non Muslims or towards Americans or whatever, because you have got to like for instance these guys at times, Muslim would be killing Muslim. Then it came out that it was a battle for turf for drugs or whatever. That is why people said no, this is not a sincere agenda. That is more what brought about the downfall, by diminishing the number of people getting involved in their activities. I don't know when I have last seen a PAGAD march..

Q: So let me generalize and ask you now what do you think are the challenges in the Western Cape for American diplomacy at this time? With your wisdom, your hindsight, and looking back over 40 years, you have been doing this for 40 years-we need to talk about your retirement. If you were advising American diplomats today in the Cape, what would be your priorities? What would you advise them that they must be addressing? What issues must they be addressing?

SASSMAN: You see, on the whole, South African society over the years that I was attached to, saw America as some kind of savior, I mean this was very evident with the fact of your first African American president. The identification especially from the Black disadvantaged community who looked still at America as that savior who can do things for them, spoke volumes. I never saw so many people sitting glued to their television set.

The other thing you must remember that we have three or four serious problems. That is housing. I don't know what order they should be in. Lack of housing, crime, unemployment. Those are three major ones. They still look to America to do something about it. Not even taking cognizance of the fact that America has its own problems. But they are still saying that, because at one they had a talk on exactly the three problems, housing, crime, and unemployment. Then they would always allude to the American model. They would say the minister keeps on speaking in parliament about the problem, and something must be done about the problem. And then people at this meeting says but what is the problem is there. We know the problem. We have identified the problem, but nobody speaks about possible solutions to the problem. The one guy got up.

Q: That goes to Hank Cohen's comment.

SASSMAN: Right. This one guy got up and he says, now look at the American system in fighting crime, the visibility of the police. I was in America, look at the amount of police cars I see. And that presence is definitely a deterrent this guy said. Which I agree with him. I always say it myself. So but I don't know when last I saw a policeman going down my street. So I say that the first thing that maybe, but the point is that guy who was not a politician, was Joe Citizen, came and referred to the American model. So people are aware of the many parallels. Granted they are differences, but the parallels between our society, and they take cognizance of the fact that the big difference is you only have black and white. We have black and the grey and what all is there. That is the major difference between the two societies.

The other thing your black is in the minority, whereas here the black is not. But they still look at America as a savior. That varies from individual to individual, but generally that is a thing. So I think they looking at, you know, and that is why I found that when we were looking, like we brought out the specialists. This was in my last year before I retired. I through the cables that offered imports. They offered an import who was a specialist on trans national crime. I You know how it works. We go to organizations and we say to them, "Look we have this person. Would you be interested if we can get this person." And I went to organizations. The next thing I didn't go to him yet, I get a call form Peter Gastrow, who was at one time the advisor to the president on security and strategic studies. It is an institute up in Rowland Street in Cape Town. He called me. He said, "Frank, thank you very much for focusing on this topic. This is not my area of specialization, but it is a crucial issue. I am prepared to set up a seminar of top individuals and host it if you can bring that guy. I know the guy and he is good."

That is where I learned, you see there are so many. We as a democracy, as a fledgling democracy. We are still battling with appropriate legislation there are so many loopholes. You find that the international crime syndicates have taken cognizance of this. So the Colombians are here; the Russians are here; the Chinese triads. Ah you name it, they are all here, and they are having a field day. And they came in I mean they came and they started gangster style just shooting the local gangsters. Get out; we want the turf. You see, I mean look, here is Peter Gastrow. He is a specialist in this field. The U.S. Model, bring it in. That is appropriate; we want it.

So I say there are times when America does something, and probably people get upset, which is a natural phenomenon. But they still look to you guys and they want your model. That is the way I see it over my years. And look, if it was not so, these guys would say, "Who the hell do you think the Americans are. We don't want to hear." No Peter Gastro calls me and he had the deputy minister of justice there. They had the minister of safety and security Willie Hofmeyr, top names. I was so impressed. He had 20 or 30 people in. And he was prepared to host that. I just took the man up there and introduced him.

Q: Looking for a model as you called it appropriate legislation.

SASSMAN: Yeah, like this guy getting up there and mentioning that definitely if we get more police. Give the minister of safety and security more money to have more cars and more police and whatever. It is not going to solve the problem but it is going to help.

Q: Well Frank Sassman. I want to deal with as a separate chapter we are going to talk later about your activities in retirement. If we can treat that as a separate subject, I think we are nearing the end of this discussion. Looking back over these 30-40 years of involvement, any parting thoughts?

SASSMAN: Well I find the one thing that I am always thankful to the Americans, maybe I should start with that growing up in an apartheid environment. I only had two jobs in my working life. I worked for 14 years as a librarian with the local municipal service, and I worked for 29 years with the American government. So I had 43 years at just two jobs. The one thing that I am thankful to the Americans it took me out of the cocoon of being a colored and just associating with coloreds. You know under apartheid I want you people to understand, under apartheid because you are living in an area that is exclusive for coloreds, you only socialize with coloreds. Then the harshness of the apartheid laws, especially the Group Areas Act it is very difficult to go to a cinema with a white guy or white woman, you cannot, because cinemas are separate. Or separate at that time. I am not talking about now, I am talking about the 50's, the 60's the 70's the 80's. And as a result I only had colored friends, colored family and that was all You know I was in that cocoon. When I started working I worked in the library for colored people, or different libraries, but for colored people. I never interacted with the libraries where there was a white clientele in the period I was with them. The other thing was when I came to the American embassy, that opened other doors for me. Your clientele was a multi racial clientele.

The primary objective of the American policy at the time when I joined the embassy in 1972 was to show South Africans and demonstrate the workability of a non racial multi racial society you bring people together of all colors and the roof doesn't come down. And so the first thing that was a problem for me was going to the first embassy function. I will never forget that. Now you must remember I was only within my colored cocoon. My work was with coloreds. There were whites but we didn't actually socialize. I just knew them as colleagues, but you didn't actually get close to them. Now I am in an environment where I have to interact with a staff which is multi racial. The other thing was that I had the clientele coming in there was white. No matter how you tried and fight this, the seed was planted under apartheid that you are inferior to the white man or woman. And I the first thing I learned when I went to the embassy, and I think it was Bob Gosende who was very sharp and he picked it up that I was having condescending conversations. I saw the white man up there or the white woman. He said something to me. "Frank, I have got to know you now, and you can stand up to anybody. You are nobody's, you are not inferior to anybody. So don't let anybody speak down to you. Look them straight in the eye and you will eliminate that condescending thing." I mean many of you guys, you don't know it but you taught me different things, and it developed me as an individual. For that, because if I meet guys, fellow librarians like me in the municipality, then I see how I have developed and they have remained static. They will say, I am not saying the Americans are perfect, but I mean they contributed a lot and it also opened doors for me.

The first function I went to, I remember there was Helen Suzman, Colin Eglin they were the regulars at the embassy circles you know. There I was standing just at the door there. I didn't socialize. Because to me it was a new environment. This was in '73. How much interaction did we have with people other, I mean like black Africans it was the first time that I got that close and interacted with my. It was things like this and I just stood there and everybody like Colin would come and you are new what do you do? And this type of thing, and people would come to me when it was my job to go to them and get to know them and talk. And that is how I started.

But today, I can walk up to anybody and I can talk to anybody and I can go to, this I learned from the Americans also. I can go to a perfect stranger and within three or four minutes we will talk as though we know each other. That I learned from the airports. I used to pick up at the airports I saw the technique they employed. How to get to know somebody. Like they will start talking to Frank. Hi am so and so. Are you married? Yeah. What is your wife's name. Monica. Have you got kids. Yeah I have three kinds. What are their names? Ben, Sonia, Paul. Immediately it is what is Monica doing, not what is your wife doing. He said, What is Monica doing. Then Ben is he still at school? Now you feel you know this guy. But if he said is your youngest son still, these are all things that I picked up and developed myself that today I am a master at communicating with people, and where did I get this? I got it from my American colleagues. Not so much my South African colleagues.

So I feel that for me it was a very good thing that happened making that change and going, and I must say my visits to America and those things helped me tremendously to develop as a person, and today my immediate family and extended family they look up to me in decisions making, problem solving, conflict management. That is all things I did in my job but I could apply it in my family. So for me it was, and it wasn't an easy decision. I didn't apply for the job.

Q: Bob Gosende came to you.

SASSMAN: He saw in the media what I was doing and he called me. He offered me a job you know. I said to him No. At that time I was working for the city council, one of the most progressive employers. Good salary, good pension you know, medical aid. I said to him, "Bob, I have got to leave good conditions of employment what can you offer me?" Immediately the man said to me, "What are you earning?" At that time I was earning, this was in 1972, I think I was earning about 150 rand a month, which was a good salary. He said, "Look, I will give you 300." He doubled my salary. Now immediately I said to him, "Bob, look, this all sounds impressive, but I never make any decisions without my wife and family, without speaking to my wife, because if I make the wrong decision they are going to suffer." So he said, "OK, take two weeks frank and then you come back to me." So I spoke to my family and to my one brother-in-law who I have a great respect for. He said, "No, don't look back. Go." He said the same thing that Bob said to me. He was a colored businessman who most of his clientele was white. He had to be a hard businessman but he was very good in his job. People respected him. He said I never let anybody speak to me in a condescending tone. Put that behind you. You are going in there, get that thing out of your mind set. You go there as an equal and you stand up to those people. Two people told me that, and that has been my outlook. I will respect the next person but that person must respect me also. So this is basically what I never answered your question, but the Americans and again I am not saying they are perfect but I learned a lot of things. It is a different culture. There are good things and bad things, and I think it is important to take the good things. You know so it is a question of composite cultures. I have got a South African, British, and American culture, and I think I have done quite good in taking the strength out of each of them and making myself a composite as far as culture goes, having a composite culture.

Q: Frank Sassman, thank you for sharing with us your vast experience and thank you for your service to the United States government and people and to your own country. Thank you very much.

SASSMAN: Thank you very much Dan. I won't forget you.

End of interview